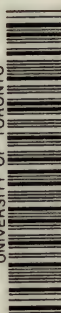
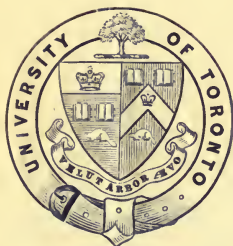


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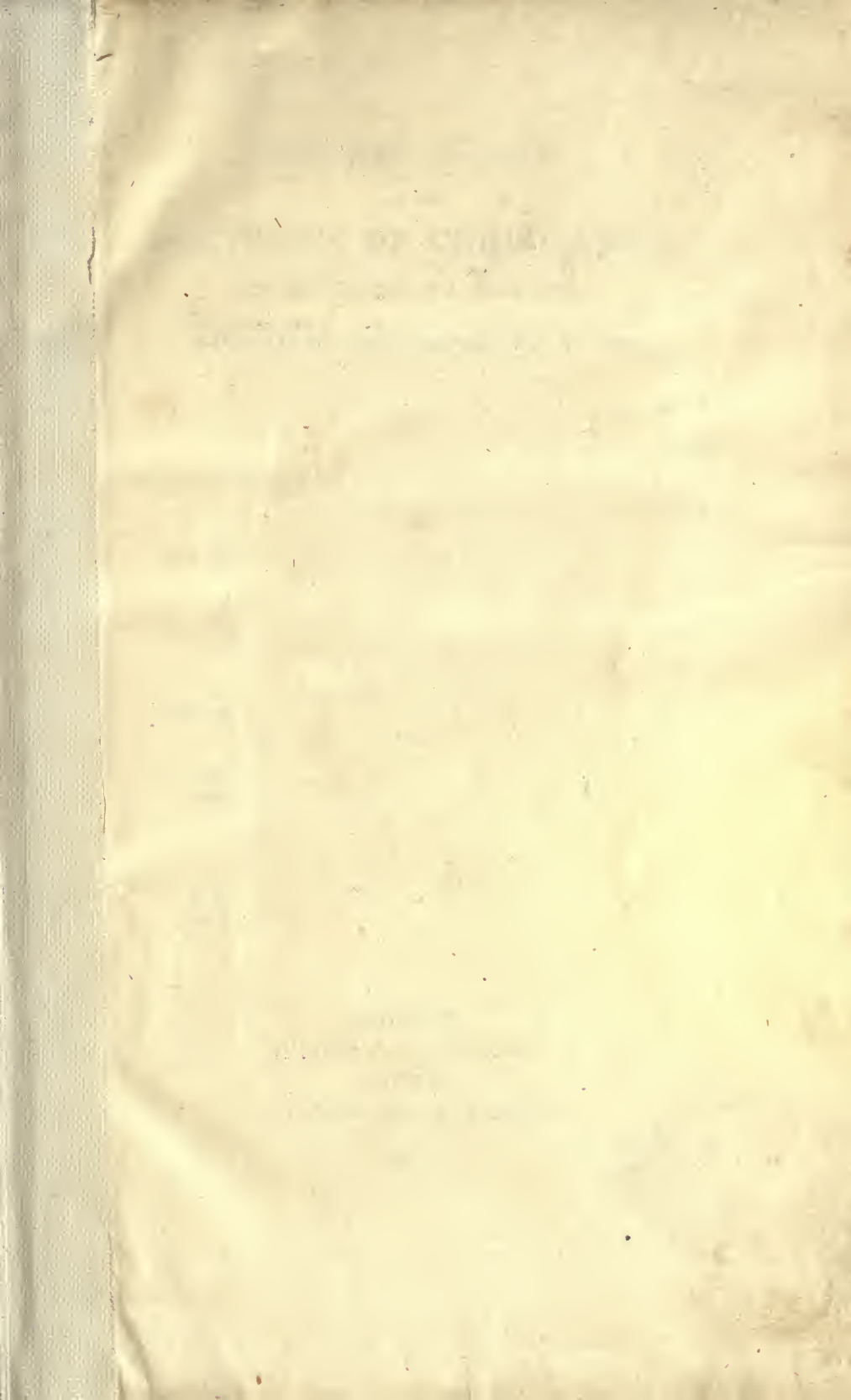


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ROBERT LAIRD BORDEN

OBSERVATIONS
ON THE
DOCTRINES OF CHRISTIANITY,
IN REFERENCE TO ARIANISM,
ILLUSTRATING THE MODERATION OF THE
ESTABLISHED CHURCH;

AND ON
THE ATHANASIAN CREED,

PURPORTING TO PROVE THAT IT IS
NOT DAMNATORY, NOR METAPHYSICAL, NOR
CONTRADICTORY;

WITH
AN APPENDIX,
CONCERNING THE STATE OF THE PRESBYTERIAN
CHURCH OF IRELAND:

OCCASIONED BY THE SERMONS OF WILLIAM BRUCE, D. D. SENIOR
MINISTER OF THE FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CONGREGATION
OF BELFAST.

BY GEORGE MILLER, D.D. M.R.I.A.
AND HON. ASSOC. OF THE ROYAL SOCIETY OF LITERATURE.

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OBSERVATIONS
ON THE
DOCTRINES OF CHRISTIANITY.

THE volume of sermons recently published by doctor Bruce appears to require some attentive consideration, as the object of the writer is to vindicate and to recommend the opinions generally denominated arian, and consequently to discredit those, which have been by most christians esteemed to be fundamental doctrines of the religion of Christ. The subject has indeed been repeatedly discussed, and answers have been frequently given to the arguments of those, who maintained the opinions advocated in these sermons ; but when erroneous opinions are again brought forward, though without any novelty either of reasoning or research, it becomes necessary that their refutation should be again adduced on the contrary side, lest any

persons should imagine, that their weakness had never been exhibited. Such repeated discussion may indeed be advantageous to the cause of truth, as it gives occasion to various minds to contemplate it in various circumstances; and it may perhaps appear that, in the progressive improvement of the human intellect, the genuine doctrines of our faith, heretofore involved in obscurity by the subtilties of scholastic disputation, may now be vindicated with a simplicity more congenial to the spirit of true religion, and more fitted to produce a religious conviction.

The sermons of doctor Bruce seem indeed to have been composed and published, as an appeal against those members of the presbyterian church of Ireland, who adhere to the doctrines of the confession of Westminster, and thereby conform to the original standard of the entire body. It may therefore be thought, that the discussion is one, with which a member of the established church has no proper concern. Various considerations have however determined the writer of this treatise to interpose his observations. Doctor Bruce has stated in his dedication, that "dissenters enlighten and check the establishment." As his view therefore has not been limited to the instruction of his presbyterian brethren, so it may be prudent for members of the established church to discuss the opinions of a writer, who thus pro-

fesses to illuminate their minds, and to restrain their abuses. Much also of the doctrines, which doctor Bruce represents as unscriptural, is held by the established church in common with those, against whom he principally argues ; and one of our creeds, though * not acknowledged by his immediate adversaries, has become the subject of his most severe reprehension. When our tenets have been thus brought into question, though but incidentally in another controversy, it becomes our duty to give a reason of our faith, and to show that the opinions proposed to be substituted for it, are unscriptural and unsound. The established church too may be regarded as especially qualified to mediate in this controversy of our presbyterian brethren, since it occupies a middle station of religious opinion between the two contending parties. It does not, with the one party, maintain the doctrine of arbitrary election and reprobation, distinctly and rigorously asserted in the confession of Westminster ; neither, with the other, does it deny the divine nature of the Redeemer of mankind, and regard him only as a ministering spirit, though of the highest order. Moderating its views of the counsels of God in the salvation of mankind,

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* It should however be remarked, that the doctrines of the athanasian creed are distinctly maintained in the confession of Westminster ; in regard to the Trinity in ch. 2, sect. 3, and in regard to the Incarnation in ch. 8, sect. 2.

as befits our very limited comprehension, and cautious also of attempting to subject the divine nature itself to the reasonings of the human intellect, it neither dogmatizes with the calvinists on the mystery of redemption, nor rationalizes with the arian on the essence of the Divinity, but confines itself to that which has been expressly revealed on either topic, satisfied that it contains nothing repugnant to the sound convictions of our natural reason.

If the hope of such a mediation could be realized, how great in a country, circumstanced as Ireland, would be the advantage redounding to the cause of true religion! The divisions of protestants have long afforded a plausible argument to the advocates of the church of Rome. Some divisions indeed are perhaps inevitable among those, who conceive it to be their most solemn duty to study their religion for themselves, instead of submitting their minds implicitly to the dictation of others; but it is the duty of all protestants to lessen such divisions as much as possible, and this duty should be felt to be more urgently obligatory, where union is more especially important to the maintenance of the common faith. When the cry of heresy has been raised against all protestants, though more especially against the established church as possessing the chief political advantages, it is time for those who have separated from the established church to consider, whether they

have indeed at this day sufficient reasons to justify a schism, which must weaken the general defence.

It is apprehended that, in this country, much of the distinctness, which now holds presbyterians in separation from the established church, is the result rather of tradition and habit, than of any real peculiarity of religious sentiment. The opinions inculcated in the sermons of doctor Bruce are indeed generally abhorrent from those of the establishment; but it is believed, notwithstanding the contrary persuasion which he has declared, that such opinions are confined to a small minority, at least of the northern presbyterians. The publication of these sermons may however even prove serviceable to the cause of religious union, by disposing those who have not yet sufficiently reflected on the true nature of their faith, to consider seriously what are the opinions which they hold, and why they remain in separation. And why may it not be hoped, that a serious and temperate discussion of the tenets advocated in the sermons, may terminate in bringing over those who are now professedly arians, to juster sentiments of religion? If such effects should indeed arise from this controversy, it would have been most happy that the occasion had been afforded by the sermons of doctor Bruce. That these effects may actually be produced, it shall be the endeavour of the writer of this treatise

tise to review his book with a moderation and candour, which, while nothing of the truth is compromised, may best conduce to the important end of religious conciliation.

In regard to many of the observations of doctor Bruce the author of this treatise readily professes a concurrence of opinion, and particularly in regard to some of those, by which he has recommended the study of the sacred writings. Even however in recommending the study of the scriptures, it must be remarked, he indicates a disposition to lower the standard of scriptural interpretation, representing the opinions which may be formed by the more ignorant classes of society as the best criterion of the doctrines, which all are required to believe. The gospel of Christ certainly was preached to the poor, and this circumstance was properly indicated by our Saviour, as a characteristic of his mission of mercy. But is it therefore reasonable to constitute ignorance the test of the knowledge of that religion, into the mystery of which even *the angels desire to look?* The sacred writings contain much, which the unlearned may study with advantage, nor is any doctrine necessary to the salvation of men, which may not be sufficiently communicated to persons in the humblest class of society. It is however a very different thing to urge, that the opinions, which such persons may form for themselves by their own unassisted perusal of

the sacred writings, should be regarded as comprehending all, which it would be desirable that even themselves should understand of the divine communications. The ignorant man, we may trust, shall not be condemned for the want of that knowledge of religion, which he had no opportunity of acquiring ; but it is the appointment of the divine providence, that others should be placed in more favourable situations, and these are bound to avail themselves of the advantages, with which they have been blessed above their brethren, and to extend to the latter the benefit of those advantages, in the religious instruction which they have thus become qualified to impart.

Whoever reflects with calmness and moderation on the various opinions, which have been entertained in regard to religion, must perceive how constantly extreme opinions tend to coincide in a common conclusion. In this instance we find the rationalizing arian urging exactly the same principle as the mystical enthusiast. The latter, referring all his doctrine to the immediate and perceptible influences of the spirit, maintains that the untutored mechanic must be competent to communicate all that man can learn of his most important interests ; the former, that he may shun the reasonings of men furnished with the aids of human learning, directs the lower and imperfectly educated classes to read their bibles for themselves, and to rest

persuaded that the opinions which they may thus collect by their own perusal, are all which it can be necessary that man should know of his religion: In each case the ignorant man is set up as the authority for religious truth, and the enthusiast and the rationalizer so far make a common cause. The man of moderate opinions will however consider the best faculties of the most improved understanding as worthily exercised in studying the revelations of his Maker, and in giving to the less informed the benefit of researches, which they must be unqualified to make. The apostle Paul did indeed admonish Timothy to avoid *oppositions of science falsely so called*, and the Colossians to beware lest any man should spoil them *through philosophy and vain deceit* ; but the philosophy, which set itself up as learned beyond the divine communications, was very different from that which is employed with humility in searching into those communications, and unfolding their true meaning to the ignorant. If it can be necessary to cite authority to prove that ignorance may be a cause of dangerous error in religion, we have the testimony of the apostle Peter, who * says of the epistles of Paul, that they contain things hard to be understood, “ which *they that are unlearned* and unstable wrest, as they do also

* Peter, ch. 3, v. 16.

the other scriptures, unto their own destruction.”

The entire history of our religion is one continued proof of the close and intimate connection subsisting between genuine Christianity and intellectual improvement. That *fulness of time*, in which the Father sent his Son to announce to the world the glad tidings of salvation, was the period of the utmost improvement of unassisted reason: when in the confusion of the middle ages a barbarous ignorance overspread the before civilized world, religion was almost wholly lost amidst the abuses of an absurd superstition: and when the intellectual light again broke forth, the eyes of men were opened to the enormities which ignorance had engendered in the time of darkness, and the Reformation asserted the purity of a scriptural religion. The connection of the Reformation with learning is too evident to be questioned. Melancthon, who completed it in Germany by composing the confession of Augsburgh, was confessedly the most distinguished scholar of his age; and Calvin, however we may dissent from his peculiar opinions, produced in his celebrated Christian Institution a work, which proves him to have possessed a mind cultivated with all the aids of learning. If intellectual refinement has been ever opposed to religion, it has been where the religion of the people was too grossly superstitious to satisfy a reasonable

and reflecting being. The same God who gave us reason, has also given us his revelation ; and if God be true, they cannot be at variance. The most improved reason can but enable us to comprehend more perfectly, and to appreciate more highly, the communications which the great author of our reason has thought it proper to impart ; and it cannot be, as doctor Bruce has represented, that the faith of an illiterate Christian should be more firm and secure than that of the true philosopher.

The same disposition to lower the standard of scriptural interpretation appears to have, in the third sermon, induced the author to narrow, as much as possible, the portion of the sacred writings, from which our religious opinions should be collected. We are accordingly required to dismiss from our consideration the book of the acts of the apostles, and the whole body of the apostolic epistles, as relating almost exclusively to the concerns of ecclesiastical government ; and in studying the gospels themselves we are directed to admit that only as authorised doctrine, which may be clearly proved from the narratives of all the four evangelists, rejecting as superfluous to human salvation every declaration of divine truth, which might be found in the writings of fewer than the whole number. Each gospel, we are told, must have contained the whole of that which was necessary for the instruction of mankind,

and therefore a communication not made by all should be regarded as not demanding our belief and acceptance.

This method of narrowing the foundation of our faith for the purpose of contracting the superstructure, now employed to justify the arian doctrine, had been by doctor Priestly applied to remove the difficulties of simple unitarianism, and has already been condemned as unwarranted by bishop Horsey, in his celebrated controversy with that distinguished leader of the unitarians of England. "Nothing," says* bishop Horsey, "seems to have been less the intention of any of the evangelists, than to compose a system of fundamental principles. Instruction, in that age, was orally delivered. The general design of the evangelists seems to have been nothing more, than to deliver in writing a simple unembellished narrative of our Lord's principal miracles; to record the occurrences and actions of his life, which went immediately to the completion of the ancient prophecies, or to the execution of the scheme of man's redemption; and to register the most interesting maxims of religion and morality, which were contained in his discourses. The principles of the christian religion are to be collected, neither from a single gospel, nor from all the four gospels; nor from the four

* Horsey's Tracts, p. 285. Dundee 1812.

gospels with the acts and the epistles ; but from the whole code of revelation, consisting of the canonical books of the Old and New Testament : and for any article of faith the authority of a single writer, where it is express and unequivocal, is sufficient. Had St. Paul related what he saw in the third heaven, I hope, Sir, you would have given him implicit credit, although the truth of the narrative must have rested on his single testimony.”

When it is considered that the book of the acts of the apostles is a narrative of the conduct of the commissioned messengers of our Redeemer, in founding the several churches of christians, and that the epistles contain the admonitions, which they judged necessary to be addressed in writing to those, whom they could not then personally visit, it seems really inconceivable that documents of so great authority should be excluded from consideration for any other reason than, however unconsciously, for this, that they contain passages embarrassing to a system of opinions, which the author is determined to maintain. The reason assigned, namely, that they do not profess to give a full and perfect account of the christian faith, is unsatisfactory, for it amounts only to this, that no fundamental and important truth can be found in the writings of any person, even though divinely inspired and commissioned, who has not professed that his specific purpose

was to make a perfect exposition of the whole truth of christianity. Why should it be supposed, that no part of the sacred writings can furnish authority for any article of religious belief, unless it propose to detail the entire system? It appears rather that the reasonable mode of forming a judgment concerning the importance of the communications made in these writings, would be to consider, whether the author faithfully recorded the declarations of men specially instructed by the Holy Spirit, as in the case of the book of the acts of the apostles, or was himself so preserved from the possibility of doctrinal error, as in that of the epistles, whatever might have been the object, which he immediately proposed.

Doctor Bruce indeed contends, that the narratives of the discourses of our Saviour must contain a perfect exposition of christian doctrine, which cannot require any further illustration. But, though our Saviour did say to his apostles, “ all things that I have heard from my Father, I have made known unto you,” it should be remembered that he also said to them, “ the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you.” It may therefore be admitted that the *many things*, which he had still to say to them, related to the abrogation of the ritual

law of the Jews, and to the calling of the gentiles, and yet the testimony, incidentally borne in the history and in the epistles of the apostles, to the great truths of the christian religion, may be entitled to the most reverential acceptance, as that of men who had not only received originally the communications of our Saviour from himself, but had also been fully instructed by the Holy Spirit in regard to the extent and purport of these very communications. This is not, as doctor Bruce has represented, to set the disciple against his master, but to respect the testimony of a disciple, whom, on the authority of his master, we know to have been perfectly instructed in regard to the communications, which that master had made. If indeed the communications of our Saviour had been recorded by himself for our instruction, there might have been some apparent reason for such a representation ; but the present question is between the disciples themselves, recording in some treatises the discourses of Jesus Christ, and in others those of divinely commissioned and instructed apostles, or addressing directly to the christian churches the exhortations of inspired wisdom.

Nor is the principle more reasonable, according to which the essential doctrines of christianity are to be collected from the evangelists themselves. It is alleged by doctor Bruce, as it had been before urged by doctor Priestley in his

defence of socinianism, that each of the evangelists must have designed to furnish a complete system of religious instruction. If then some doctrine be found clearly revealed in one gospel, which had not been stated with equal distinctness in the others, what is to be done ? The answer is that this doctrine should be regarded as not necessary. Why then was it revealed ? Must we suppose that the Deity varied his communications, that, while enough was made known in all for the instruction and salvation of mankind, some information should also be separately imparted in some one or more, which should be superfluous to these great purposes of his mercy, but might serve for the gratification of curious and speculative persons, who should wish to know more of such matters than ordinary men ? Who will maintain that it is more reasonable to think, that he has judged correctly of the specific design of each of the evangelists, in giving his narrative to the world, than that the Almighty should not have made any clear and distinct communication, for which he did not claim the reverential acceptance of his creatures, as important to their everlasting interests ? We, on the other hand, hold, that all which God has made known by any part of the sacred writings, is essentially necessary for the salvation of all those persons, who have enjoyed the means of acquiring so much knowledge of divine truth,

though we trust that the poor and ignorant shall be accepted by him, according to a just consideration of their limited opportunity of obtaining spiritual information. We do not reject as unimportant any part of that knowledge, which God has thought fit to be communicated, arrogating to ourselves the right of determining, how much ought to have been revealed, if the revelation had any reasonable purpose. The principle indeed, on which alone this right can be maintained, is such, that it cannot even be examined without some appearance of irreverence.

Doctor Bruce has endeavoured to prove that each of the four evangelists professed to deliver every essential principle of the truth of the gospel. What is the fact. Matthew clearly has made no such profession, for he has begun his gospel simply with entitling it “the book of the generation of Jesus Christ,” the natural inference from which is, agreeably * to the consent of antiquity, that he composed it with the design of proving to the Jews that Jesus was the expected Messiah. Mark has commenced his narrative merely with naming it “the gospel of Jesus Christ ;” and † it appears both from the testimony of ancient writers and from internal

* Horne's *Introd. to the Critical Study and Knowledge of the Holy Scriptures*, vol. 4. p. 264. Lond. 1822.

† *Ibid.* p. 271.

evidence, that it was designed to be a summary of the preaching of Peter, to whom Mark had been long a companion. The design of Luke has been declared by himself to have been to substitute for various defective, though authentic, accounts of Jesus Christ, one more complete narrative, that his friend Theophilus might know the certainty of those things, wherein he had been already instructed. There is however in this preface no assurance given, that the narrative should omit nothing essential to salvation, but merely that it should be the work of one, who had “ perfect understanding of all things from the very first,” and was therefore competent to establish the conviction of his friend on grounds of sufficient certainty. The general purpose of John, in common with the other evangelists, was, as he has * himself declared, to prove that Jesus was the Messiah, and that believing we may have life through his name ; but his special purposes appear to have been to refute the heretics who had already corrupted the christian doctrine, and to supply a narrative of those actions and discourses of our Saviour, which had been omitted by the other evangelists. In every instance we find some object distinct from undertaking to propose a perfect system of christian doctrine. Matthew wrote to satisfy the Jews that Jesus was the

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* John, ch. 20, v. 31.

Messiah, whom their prophets had taught them to expect; Mark to gratify those who were anxious to retain a memorial of the preaching of Peter; Luke to strengthen the conviction of an individual by a comprehensive narrative; and John to confute heretics and to supply omissions.

It may appear from these observations that, if the rule proposed by doctor Bruce were admitted, it would exclude from our consideration chiefly the testimony of the beloved companion of our Lord, because the narrative of this evangelist has more which is peculiar to itself than the others, John having proposed to himself peculiar objects, and especially to record those discourses, which the other evangelists had failed to relate. In this manner we should lose the very important advantage of receiving from the beloved disciple the narrative, which, on account of his affectionate intimacy with his master, should naturally engage our principal attention; and in relinquishing this advantage we should be deprived of the instruction to be derived from him, who has, more than any other evangelist, communicated the doctrinal discourses of our Saviour. This may indeed suit well the plan of one, who wishes to pare down the doctrine of christianity to the standard of a narrow faith; but will not satisfy the mind of him, who is anxious to receive the

fullest and the most authentic testimony of the declarations of Jesus Christ.

It is a little remarkable, that doctor Bruce has selected the texts of eight of his fourteen sermons from the acts of the apostles and from the epistles, those parts of the New Testament, which he has wholly proscribed, as insufficient to afford authority to any doctrine, and of three others from the gospel of John, which more than any other gospel contains communications not common to the rest, the remaining three texts having been taken from the Old Testament, and not referring to any particular doctrine of christianity. This seems to be a practical abandonment of the very rule of selection, which he has himself laboured to establish.

Doctor Bruce has however endeavoured, in his fourth sermon, to support his rule, by showing that some doctrines have been revealed, which are, as he has stated, merely speculative. But it is obvious that Moses, from whom he has taken the text of this sermon, has made no such distinction. "Secret things," says Moses, "belong unto the Lord our God; but those things which are revealed, belong unto us and to our children, for ever, that we may do all the words of this law." *Secret things*, in the language of Moses, are not mysteries or things imperfectly revealed, but those which have not been at all revealed. To secret things accordingly he has opposed those which have been re-

vealed, and among the latter he has distinguished no classes, but has represented all as alike belonging to that generation and to their posterity, and this for the practical purpose of doing all the words of the law. Could it indeed have been the will of the Deity, that speculative men should receive amusement from any part of his communications? When the apostle was addressing the idle and speculative Athenians, such parts of revelation, if any such existed, might have been very appropriately selected, and would doubtless have been received with eager attention. The apostle however appears to have discovered none of this nature in the divine communications, but when he had stated the great truths of natural religion, urged upon his hearers the duty of repentance, enforced by the doctrines of a resurrection and a future judgment, which are certainly not speculative. He did not enter into speculative discussions with the two parties of philosophers, the stoics and the epicureans, by whom he was encountered, but at once pressed upon his hearers the unreasonableness of the idolatry by which all were corrupted, and the necessity of preparing themselves to abide the great day of trial. They were not prepared for receiving the practical details of the christian faith, and the apostle could not tell them of any particulars, which might serve merely to occupy a vacant curiosity. Christ having come into the

world for the salvation of men, the communications which he has made, must all have a practical relation to our spiritual interests.

This distinction of doctrines into speculative and practical has indeed been extended by doctor Bruce much further than that, which rejects so large a portion of the scriptures of the New Testament from the rank of doctrinal authorities, for in the class of speculative doctrines he has placed the intimations, which we have received of the attributes, character, and nature of God, of every thing beyond the mere knowledge of his existence. “The knowledge of the existence of God is,” he has remarked, “communicated to us by design, as a truth of prime importance to our well-being and improvement. But this could not be done without giving us some intimation of his attributes, character, and nature.” Doctor Bruce appears thus to have conceived that he could penetrate into the secret counsels of the Deity, and ascertain what communications he has made voluntarily, and what others he found it impracticable to withhold; and by this extraordinary discovery he has been enabled to ascertain, what divine communications may be safely and properly neglected, as not intended to be disclosed.

It is perfectly true, that whosoever presumes to work upon the materials furnished by divine revelation, and to frame for himself systems of the-

ology exceeding the measure of the divine communications, is not only very foolishly, but even very mischievously employed. Does it however follow from this, that we should not attach importance to these communications, so far as they have been made, but should regard the greater portion of them as imparted only incidentally, and because they could not be withheld? Who is competent to say, that any communication has been made by the Almighty unintentionally, and to no purpose? Who shall say, what that communication is, which he had made by design, and what that is, which has thus been made without design? Doctor Bruce, who has protested against enquiring into the purposes of the divine mind, has himself, in his anxiety to preclude all such enquiries, pronounced a very decisive, but surely a most unaccountable judgment, concerning the purpose of that great Being in communicating a knowledge of himself.

When we have been directed to neglect, as incidental and undesigned communications, those intimations which have been given concerning the attributes, character, and nature of God, it cannot be supposed, that much attention should be permitted to the agency employed in the redemption of man. This subject is indeed wholly excluded, not merely as speculative and unimportant, but even as not at all disclosed. “The natures and relations of the

spiritual agents employed in redemption” are accordingly mentioned by the author, in an enumeration of the secret things, which have not been revealed. If this be once assumed, there can be little difficulty in establishing the arian doctrine, for the reality of any communication, which might contradict it, is excluded from the discussion. Still however it might be demanded, why should even the arian doctrine be inculcated as necessary, since this also treats of the natures and relations of those agents, and therefore, by the application of the same rule, ought to be rejected, as not authorised by any divine communications. The religion of Christ is thus cut down to mere unitarianism, differing from deism only in this, that it would admit the testimony of revelation, to prove the existence of a God. The difference indeed is not very important, since the existence of a God must have been acknowledged, before any testimony could be received as a divine revelation.

So much having been done for excluding mysteries and narrowing the faith of a christian, it does not appear why the work should have been prosecuted further. No man, who admits a divine revelation, can refuse to acknowledge the existence of its author; and every enquiry into the nature of God has been referred to the class of mere speculation, every consideration of the character and office of our

Saviour and the Holy Spirit has been precluded, as a vain attempt to penetrate into a secret not at all revealed. These topics have nevertheless been discussed in the remaining sermons, and therefore require to be here examined, that the opinions particularly advocated by the author may be proved to be inconsistent with the genuine interpretation of the sacred writings.

That these opinions will not bear the test of a fair examination of the scriptures, every man indeed, who reverences the whole of the sacred volume, and regards it as recording the dictates of divine wisdom, will naturally be led at once to conclude. The writer himself, by his anxiety to reduce the authoritative communications of our faith, not merely to the narratives of the evangelists, but even to a digest of that which has been explicitly declared in common by all, has suggested a persuasion, that his opinions could not be maintained, if the other parts of the New Testament be allowed to have authority; and by his other distinction, which rejects, as an undesigned and merely speculative communication, every doctrine except that of the existence of a God, he has even taught us to conclude, without further enquiry, that the little residue of the New Testament, to which he would allow authority, would be found to contain statements repugnant to his system, which must therefore by such a distinction be

excluded from the discussion. The conclusion thus suggested by the preparatory observations of doctor Bruce, will, it is believed, be amply justified by a detailed examination of his tenets.

Of the fifth sermon, which treats of the nature of God, it does not appear necessary to make any observation, except that it concludes with stating a principle, which, by the ambiguity of a word, may lead into an important error. "Remember," says the author, "that mysteries can make no part of a covenant." If by mysteries be meant things not at all revealed, and therefore wholly unknown, they most certainly can make no part of a covenant, because the condition of a covenant, to be observed, must be known. But if the term be understood to signify things made known by revelation, which could not naturally be known; or things partly so made known, and partly remaining unrevealed, no reason appears, why they might not constitute a part of such an engagement, as it requires only that the immediate condition be sufficiently understood for regulating the conduct of men. If the revelation be complete, why should it be at all excluded from a covenant? If it be partial, why should it not be admitted, so far as the communication may extend? All that can be necessary to the existence of a covenant in any case, is that the stipulation on each side should be

Observations on the

so far understood, as to induce the observance of the engagement. The stipulation may however be connected, and in fact is always connected, with something which we are naturally incapable of knowing, yet without annulling the agreement. The principle of life in organized beings is probably for ever undiscoverable, yet the obligations of all the covenants concluded between men, are necessarily connected with this unknown principle of living existence, for a man can engage himself only on the supposition that he, or some other person, shall be alive at the time, when the performance of the condition may be required. The merchant does not refuse to accept, or pass a bill, because the payment involves a consideration of the life of man; the speculator and the contractor, in their various engagements, calculate on the agency of the same principle, not only in men, but in brute animals, and vegetables; and the insurance-company does not hesitate to enter into covenants, the very subject of which is the operation of the truly mysterious principle of vitality. If however no covenant can exist between us and God, involving any relation to his mysterious nature, how could any of these covenants exist between one man and another, dependent as they are at least on the continuance of the lives of the parties, perhaps also on the agency of the living principle in surround-

ing objects? We are as ignorant of the animating principle of the meanest vegetable, as of any mystery connected with a doctrine of religion.

To the observations, which doctor Bruce has made on predestination, election, and reprobation, so far as they are opposed to the notion of an arbitrary determination of the eternal happiness or misery of men, no regard being had to the moral conduct of the individuals so discriminated, the author of this treatise will offer no reply. These doctrines he does not himself esteem as truly expressing the sense of the sacred writings, and therefore, as far as they are concerned, he is willing to make with the author of the sermons a common cause. He is himself far from believing "that God, by an absolute decree, hath elected to salvation a very small number of men, without any regard to their faith or obedience whatever, and secluded from saving grace all the rest of mankind; and appointed them, by the same decree, to eternal damnation, without any regard to their infidelity or impenitency." This appalling doctrine he does not hold, because he considers it to be not warranted by any authority of the sacred writings; not reconcilable to our notions of the moral attributes of God, to which he has himself appealed; and contradictory to numerous passages of the scriptures, inviting all persons to repentance, and offering alike to all

the benefits of the divine mercy in the great plan of human redemption.

But, though the author of this treatise agrees with doctor Bruce, in rejecting the doctrine of arbitrary, and, as they are termed, *irrespective*, election and reprobation, he is by no means disposed to concur with him in the opinion, which he would establish in its place. Doctor Bruce, as the alternative, has adopted on this subject an opinion, which had been advocated by Locke and Taylor, that predestination relates exclusively to that outward calling of the gentiles, by which they were invited to become, together with the chosen people, members of the church of Christ. It must indeed be acknowledged, that some passages of the sacred writings, in which the writers address, as the elect of God, collective bodies of men, may appear to bear this meaning, because among these numbers must have been some individuals, who could not be supposed to have been objects of the divine acceptance. But even in such passages it may easily be understood, that the terms *elect* and *predestinate* may still be referred to individuals in a looser application, in the same manner in which a numerous body of men may be denominated christians, though neither can this appellation be properly applicable to every individual.

Doctor Bruce has endeavoured to confirm the interpretation of Locke and Taylor by remark-

ing, that the terms relating to this subject do not occur in the epistle to the Hebrews, which was not composed for the gentile converts. It may however be observed in reply, that this cannot be said of the first epistle of Peter, which is addressed to the Jews of the dispersion, *παρεπιδήμοις διασπορᾶς*, who are said to be “elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father.” The epistle addressed to the Hebrews, on the other hand, is understood to have had one distinct object, namely that of dissuading the converted Jews from returning to the religion of Moses, which required only that the character and office of Jesus should be magnified to the Jews.

The true doctrine of predestination must chiefly be collected from the remarkable passage in the eighth chapter of the epistle to the Romans—“whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the first-born among many brethren. Moreover, whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: whom he justified, them he also glorified.” In paraphrasing these words the two commentators appear not to have observed, that their application is in the verse immediately preceding limited to “them that love God,” as “the called according to his purpose;” and that therefore they cannot be understood to signify any

collective calling, which must comprehend many, who do not truly love God. The interpretation of the passage itself is also embarrassed by a considerable difficulty, when it is referred to a collective calling, for the commentators have found themselves compelled to interpret the words *justify* and *glorify*, as relating only to a conditional purpose of God, whereas the preceding words *foreknow*, *predestinate*, and *call*, are admitted to be absolute and unconditional. The words *justify* and *glorify* could not be applied unconditionally to collective bodies of men, many individuals of whom are conceived to be unworthy. It therefore became necessary to introduce the condition of obedience, and thus to give one interpretation, which is unqualified and unconditional, to terms which precede in the sentence, and another, which is only conditional, to those which follow, though all the five are in the text simply enunciated. Nor are these all the objections, which may be urged against this interpretation, for it deprives the word *foreknow* of its proper signification, and refers it solely to the intention of God. Whom, it says, God did foreknow, with an intention to make them his peculiar church and people, he determined should be conformed to the image of his son. In this paraphrase the word implies no knowledge, except of the mere purpose of calling the gentiles, nothing directly relating to the persons who were to be called;

and the passage of the epistle would signify only that, whom God did intend to predestinate, he did also actually predestinate. But we do not require the authority of an apostle for assuring us, that God did execute that which he had purposed. And it is moreover particularly deserving of attention, that the commentators, who maintain this opinion of an outward and collective calling, are yet compelled to abandon this interpretation of the passage in regard to the terms *justify* and *glorify*, by referring these to the conduct of individuals. These terms were too precise for their management.

Whitby has justly remarked on this passage, that the words *know* and *foreknow*, in the language of the scriptures, import a knowledge joined with approbation and affection. In the gospel by Matthew, ch. 7. v. 23. we find these words ; “ then will I profess unto them, I never knew you : depart from me ye that work iniquity.” In that by John, ch. 10. v. 14. “ I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep, and am known of mine.” “ If any man,” says the apostle, in the first epistle to the Corinthians, ch. 8. v. 3. “ love God, the same is known of him.” In the epistle to the Galatians, ch. 4. v. 9. he says, “ but now after that ye have known God, or rather are known of God.” In the second epistle to Timothy, ch. 2. v. 19. he says, “ the Lord knoweth them that are his.” The word *foreknow*

is also used with a correspondent application in the epistle to the Romans itself. “ God,” says the apostle, ch. 11. v. 2. “ hath not cast away his people, which he foreknew ;” and the succeeding verses show, that the word there relates to that still subsisting fidelity, with which seven thousand men refused to bow the knee to Baal. Locke indeed himself has, in his paraphrase, added to the word “ an intention of kindness,” but we cannot understand any moral approbation of the whole gentile world, so that the intention, in his interpretation, could relate only to the purpose of God, as has been already stated, and consequently be liable to the same objection of reducing the passage to a mere statement of this proposition, that God did execute that which he had proposed.

The foreknowledge then, mentioned in the eighth chapter of the epistle to the Romans, may consistently be understood to mean a foreknowledge of the dispositions of certain individuals, which would render them fit objects of the merciful determinations of God. The predestination mentioned by the apostle is thus not extended to collective bodies of men, outwardly constituting the christian church, yet in many instances disregarding and violating the duties prescribed by their religious profession ; but is limited to those persons, who, in the foreknowledge of God, should be deemed by him qualified to be admitted to the

mercies prepared for the sincere followers of Christ.

That God in his prescience should have determined the future condition of every individual, according as he foreknew the qualities and conduct of each, agrees with those passages of the scriptures, which ascribe to the antecedent appointment of God the decision of the future happiness or misery of every man ; and also to those others, which assure us, that he is willing that all men should be saved, and consequently preclude the supposition, that the offer of salvation was, in his counsels, limited to a small number selected from the rest of mankind. The determination of God being understood to rest upon a foreknowledge of the qualities of the individual, and sufficient assistance being also understood to be offered to every man, the divine purposes are not arbitrary and *irrespective*, but differ from the determinations of an equitable and merciful judge, only inasmuch as these have been anticipated by the divine foreknowledge.

This interpretation of the doctrine of predestination is indeed embarrassed by the difficulty of reconciling the foreknowledge of God with the freedom of human actions. This difficulty * the socinians removed by denying the foreknowledge of God, and holding that God had only

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* Burnet on the 39 Articles, art. 17.

decreed generally, that those who should believe and obey the gospel, should be saved, and that those who should live and die in sin, should be damned. But those who believe that God has been actually the author of predictions, comprehending all the most important changes of human history, and consequently all the future fortunes, not only of nations, but also of the individuals, of which they are composed, must admit his foreknowledge, as extending to every action of his creatures ; and if we are indeed possessed of freedom, as not only our own intimate consciousness, but also the very language of scripture, in which we are addressed as accountable beings, leads us irresistibly to believe, we must conclude that the two are really reconciled, though our very limited faculties, incapable as they must be, of forming any judgment of the mind and knowledge of God, are unable to conceive the manner. We know however that they have been expressly pronounced by our Saviour to have been combined in regard to that event, on which the salvation of mankind depends. “ The son of man,” says he, “ goeth as it is written of him : but woe unto that man, by whom the son of man is betrayed !” The denunciation of woe against the betrayer implies, as surely as God is just, that the offence was the act of a being accountable, because he was free ; and yet the occasion of that denunciation is represented by

our Saviour himself to have been written in the divine predictions, and consequently to have been anticipated by the divine foreknowledge. To reject on account of such a difficulty the doctrine, which has been stated, is therefore to reject all prophecy, and to deprive of every reasonable interpretation the declaration of our Saviour.

Burnet, though he has represented the seventeenth of the articles of the established church, as admitting either this interpretation, or one agreeable to the doctrine of Calvin, has declared that he considered the latter as the more natural construction. Enquiry has however been recently* directed to the history of our articles, and it has been ascertained, that the eminent persons, by whom they were framed, abstained cautiously from every expression which might countenance a calvinistical interpretation, taking for their model in other particulars the lutheran confession of Augsburg, which omitted the doctrine of predestination, and in their statement of this doctrine, which the contention of the calvinists had rendered unavoidable, adhering as closely, as was possible, to the very expressions of the sacred writings. The articles could not be framed according to the sentiments of Arminius,

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* By Archbishop Laurence in his Bampton Lectures; and by Mr. Todd in his treatise on Original Sin, Free-Will etc.

which were not published until the followning century ; but care appears to have been employed, that they should not be conformed to those of Calvin. Our seventeenth article indeed, composed as the earlier part of it has been in expressions almost exclusively scriptural, seems to have been prepared, not for proposing any specific exposition of the scriptural doctrine, but for introducing the cautions, with which it is concluded, against the mischievous inferences deduced by calvinistical refinements. That such refinements are indeed mischievous, may now be stated on the authority of a very distinguished calvinist of our church. “ Let me then speak the truth before God,” says* Mr. Simeon ; “ though I am no arminian, I do think that the refinements of Calvin have done great harm in the church—they have driven multitudes away from the plain and popular way of speaking used by the inspired writers, and have made them unreasonably and unscripturally squeamish in their modes of expression ; and I conceive that the less addicted any person is to systematic accuracy, the more he will accord with the inspired writers, and the more he will approve of the views of our reformers.”

The question of predestination is intimately connected with another concerning original sin,

* *Horæ Homileticæ* by the Rev. C. Simeon, vol. 2. p. 200. Lond. 1819.

on which doctor Bruce contends for the total exemption of our nature from every corruption of transmitted evil. The passage, which he has quoted from the catechism of his calvinistic brethren, is indeed sufficiently alarming. “The sinfulness of that estate, into which man fell, consisteth in the guilt of Adam’s first sin ; the want of that righteousness wherein he was created, and the corruption of his nature, whereby he (man) is utterly indisposed, disabled, and made opposite to all that is spiritually good, and wholly inclined to all evil ; and that, continually.—The fall brought upon mankind the loss of communion with God, his displeasure and curse, so as *we are by nature children of wrath, bond-slaves to Satan*, and justly liable to all punishments, in this world and that which is to come :—in this world, blindness of mind, a reprobate sense, strong delusions, hardness of heart, horror of conscience, and vile affections ; and the curse of God upon the creatures for our sakes :—in the world to come, everlasting separation from the comfortable presence of God, and most grievous torments in soul and body without intermission, in hell-fire, for ever.” To these words doctor Bruce has added, as repugnant to the favourable representation of the moral state of little children, made by our Saviour himself to his followers, another passage, which describes them, if neither baptized nor converted, as “ vessels

of wrath, under the curse of God, wholly made up of sin, and who could do nothing but sin." It is not unnatural that an exposition of this doctrine so strongly and harshly stated, should dispose any man of mild dispositions to seek another interpretation; but before he should maintain the entire exemption from all hereditary taint of sin, and consequently the unimpaired sufficiency of our natural powers, it might be prudent to consider, whether a temperate statement could not be found, which would agree at once with the language of the sacred writings, with the ordinary experience of every man, and with the conceptions of our natural reason.

Such a temperate statement of this doctrine might have been found in the ninth article of our church. "Original sin," it is there stated, "standeth not in the following of Adam (as the pelagians do vainly talk) but it is the fault or corruption of the nature of every man, that naturally is engendered of the offspring of Adam, whereby man is very far gone from original righteousness, and is of his own nature inclined to evil, so that the flesh lusteth always contrary to the spirit, and therefore in every person born into the world it deserveth God's wrath and damnation: and this infection of nature doth remain, yea in them that are regenerated, whereby the lust of the flesh, called in Greek φρόνημα σαρκός, which some do expound

the wisdom, some sensuality, some the affection, some the desire of the flesh, is not subject to the law of God. And though there is no condemnation for them that believe and are baptized, yet the apostle doth confess that concupiscence and lust hath of itself the nature of sin."

A very superficial comparison may discover, how much more temperate is this statement of the doctrine of a transmitted corruption of nature, than that quoted by doctor Bruce from the catechism of calvinistic presbyterians. Original sin is here represented as a fault or corruption of nature, "whereby man is very far gone from original righteousness, and is of his own nature inclined to evil:" but it is not said, as in the quoted passage, that "he is utterly indisposed, disabled, and made opposite to all that is spiritually good, and wholly inclined to all evil; and that, continually." In the varied exposition too of the greek terms *φρόνημα σαρκός*, an anxious desire is manifested, of avoiding a harsh and peremptory determination of their meaning; and it is then simply declared, that the principle which they express, whatever may be the most accurate interpretation, "is not subject to the law of God." The article moreover is concluded with observing, that "the apostle doth confess," not rigorously denounce, that this same "concupiscence and lust hath of itself the nature of sin," even avoiding

to declare that it is sin in a true and proper acceptation of the term.

In illustration of the doctrine thus temperately proposed it may be remarked, that unenlightened reason has acknowledged the general prevalence of moral evil in the world, and seems to have ascribed the corruption of the existing generation to a taint derived from a corrupted ancestry. Cicero, * while he contends for in-born principles of rectitude, represents them as so quickly overborne and stifled by the prevailing depravation of the world, that men seem to have sucked in error almost with the milk of their nurses : and Horace † has used language, which appears to imply, that his countrymen had inherited from their fathers the accumulated corruption of preceding ages, which they were themselves to transmit with increase to their posterity. The philosopher has borne his testimony to the universal depravation ; the poet, who addressed himself to the common feelings

* — Parvolos nobis dedit (natura) igniculos, quos celeriter malis moribus opinionibusque depravati sic restringimus, ut nusquam naturæ lumen appareat : sunt enim ingeniis nostris semina innata virtutum ; quæ si adolescere liceret, ipsa nos ad beatam vitam natura perduceret. Nunc autem, simul atque editi in lucem et suscepti sumus, in omni continuo pravitate et in summa opinionum perversitate versamur : ut pæne cum lacte nutricis errorem suxisse videamur. Tusc. Disp. lib. 3. c. 1.

† Ætas parentum, pejor avis, tulit

Nos nequiores, mox daturos

Progeniem vitiosiore.

Od. 3. 6.

of mankind, traces this depravation to a successive inheritance of evil dispositions ; and both together give their authority to the principle, that man is corrupt by a transmitted viciousness of nature. To us revelation has presented it in its details, connecting it however at the same time with a consolation, to which heathenism was a stranger, an assurance of redeeming mercy ; but even without the aid of a divine communication it could be perceived, that men were generally influenced by evil dispositions, and that vicious propensities appeared to be propagated in the very constitution of our nature.

Doctor Bruce has indeed directed us to consider the scriptural expressions, which have strongly stated the universal depravity of our unassisted nature, as applicable only to the general corruption of the world, not to the moral condition of each individual. This direction would deserve attention, if such expressions were found only in descriptions of wickedness, which might be regarded as eloquent amplifications, not designed to be rigorously interpreted. If however these expressions occur, not merely in eloquent description, but also in argumentative discussion, and if the force of the inference in this discussion demand that they should be strictly understood, the case is then very different ; we must receive them in all the extent of their application, or reject the conclusion which they are brought to establish.

Now what is the object of the apostle in the epistle addressed to the Romans? To prove that salvation could be obtained only through the interposition of Jesus Christ. For this purpose it was necessary, that he should maintain the absolute incapacity of every human being to procure salvation for himself by his own works, whether the ceremonial observances of the Jewish law, or the practices of moral righteousness.

Doctor Bruce has argued at considerable length, to prove that the guilt of the sin of Adam has not been directly imputed to his descendants, however they may have been all involved in the penalty of death, as the consequence of his transgression. This may be a good argument, as addressed to his brethren of the confession of Westminster; but for us of the established church it is sufficient to state, in the words of Burnet, that “the imputation of Adam’s sin to his posterity, and its being considered by God as their own act, not being expressly taught in the article, here was that moderation observed, which the compilers of the articles have shown on many other occasions.” Doctor Bruce therefore, if he would have looked beyond the tenets of his presbyterian brethren, might in this case also have discovered a temperate interpretation of the sacred writings, which would have precluded the alternative of maintaining, in contradiction to all experience, scarcely less

than to those scriptures, the unimpaired sufficiency of our moral nature.

The philosophers and the poets of pagan antiquity looked back to a golden age of innocence, from which they acknowledged a deplorable and general degeneracy, and delighted themselves with a persuasion, that, in some great revolution of the providential government of the world, this state of things might yet return, and man be restored to his primeval innocence. The sacred writings, while they have discovered to us the true and effectual remedy, in the interposition of Jesus Christ and the assurance of the Holy Spirit, have informed us of the particulars of that degeneracy, thus vaguely noticed by the pagans. From them we learn, that there was indeed, though of very short continuance, a time of primeval innocence, and that the offence of our first parents entailed on their posterity, not only the sentence of mortality for the offence already committed, but also an inherent corruption of nature, unfitting them for obeying the divine commands with the original freedom of their race. If the reforming influence of revealed religion has, as might be expected, diminished the mass of moral evil in the world, shall it thence be concluded, that man is not naturally and individually corrupted? Shall the renovating efficacy of the religion of Christ be urged as an argument against the necessity of his interposition? “ Shall,” as bishop

Sherlock eloquently demanded of the infidel, availing himself of the knowledge communicated by revelation, "the withered arm, which Christ has restored, be lifted up against him?"

The two doctrines of *irrespective* or arbitrary predestination, and of the direct imputation of the guilt of Adam to his posterity, appear to have been extreme opinions generated in the vehemence of theological disputation. Neither has been adopted in the articles of our church. For the former it has substituted an assemblage of the expressions of the sacred writings, with admonitions against the abuses of an extreme interpretation. In regard to the other it has been silent, maintaining however the transmission of a moral corruption, by which all the posterity of Adam have become inclined to evil. Doctor Bruce, on the other hand, has permitted himself, in his rejection of these opinions, to be hurried into others which are not less extreme. Condemning the doctrine, which represents human salvation as the arbitrary work of God, not having any reference to the conduct of the individuals who are its objects, he has pronounced that the predestination, of which the apostle speaks, must relate only to that outward calling, by which men are brought into the visible church of God, comprehending consequently many, who cannot be among the objects of divine acceptance, and therefore not connected with the future condition, of indivi-

duals. This indeed is an opinion, which, though it appear not reconcileable to the language of the apostle, may however be safely entertained, if the fundamental doctrine of our dependence on Jesus Christ for salvation be notwithstanding preserved inviolate. But when doctor Bruce, in opposition to the extreme interpretation of the doctrine of original sin, contends that the nature of man is still as upright as in the beginning, and consequently that it depends only on our own free choice, whether we shall conform to the commandments of God, it must be manifest, that "boasting" is no longer "excluded," since it must be still possible, according to such a view of human nature, that every individual should by an undeviating obedience entitle himself to the favourable acceptance of God.

The condition of our nature having been so far considered, it is now time to turn our view to that being, who is the grand agent in the plan of human redemption, and to compare with the scriptures the representation which doctor Bruce has given of his nature and functions.

The nature and character of Jesus Christ constitute indeed the main principle of the religion, which we profess. We cannot properly appreciate our redemption, if we form an unworthy conception of him, who was the grand agent in our deliverance from the

penalties of sin ; nor can we, without a just notion of his dignity and office, determine what sentiments we are bound to entertain in regard to him, what conduct we are bound to observe in relation to his person. This subject of enquiry has accordingly engaged attention from the first period of the christian church. The apostle John found it necessary to assert the divinity of Jesus Christ against the heretics even of the apostolic age ; Arius, a presbyter of Alexandria, proposed in the fourth century the opinion, which has received its denomination from him, that the second person of the trinity was totally and essentially distinct from the first, and but the noblest of created beings ; and we are in the nineteenth century called to prove that this doctrine is not consonant to a just interpretation of the sacred writings, and to establish the divine character of the redeemer of mankind.

Doctor Bruce indeed would dispose of the whole question by a definition. “ The strictest assertors of the divinity of Christ,” says he, “ acknowledge him to be a derived being—Now the primary and fundamental idea, which we annex to the word God, is that he is himself underived, and the cause of every thing that exists.” Thus to prove that Christ is not God, all that we have to do, is to define God to be a being underived, for the conclusion will follow by a necessary inference. It may however

be easily shown, that this argument is merely an example of the fallacy denominated *petitio principii*, or *begging the question*. The question is whether any distinction can exist in the divine nature, by which that nature, acknowledged to be itself underived, may yet be communicated to various persons. To assume that the divine nature must in every case be underived, is to take for granted, that no such distinction can exist, as is the very subject of enquiry. It is indeed acknowledged that Jesus Christ is a derived being, and that the divine nature is in itself underived ; but it is contended that Jesus Christ participates by derivation that nature, which is underived in the Father. This question must be determined by scriptural authorities, not by a definition, by which the conclusion is assumed.

Another general argument urged by doctor Bruce, is that to embrace the arian doctrine is the best method of escaping from difficulties. This may perhaps be admitted. But what is the legitimate inference ? That the arian doctrine cannot be the truth. Difficulties should be expected to be found, when mortals endeavour to penetrate the mystery of their redemption ; the plan in its whole extent must be too vast, the agents in their exalted nature must be too sublime, for our very limited comprehension. The absence of difficulties should therefore rather be understood to indicate, that

the mind had erred in its enquiries into divine truth, and that the system, which it had framed, was of man, and not of God. It was once happily observed to the writer of this treatise, that, if we could suppose the present difficulties to be explained by a fuller revelation, other and more numerous difficulties would probably present themselves, as the boundary of our knowledge had been extended, and the things which we should know, would thus be connected with a larger portion of those, which were still unexplained, and perhaps wholly inexplicable. If such be a reasonable view of this high subject, to escape from difficulties must be to abandon the truth. It is our duty to consider, not what is the system of opinions most nearly level to our comprehensions, but what is that, which most aptly corresponds to the declarations of the sacred records of revelation.

Among these declarations that of the apostle John demands our first attention, because, according to its literal meaning, it expressly ascribes to our Saviour a divine character, and the genuineness of the passage admits no controversy. It is not easy to conceive any testimony to the divinity of Jesus Christ more direct and explicit than these acknowledged words of the evangelist : “ in the beginning was the * word,

* The Greek term *λόγος*, which is here translated *word*,

and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." The term *Word* is subject to no

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is by Michaelis supposed to have been borrowed from the *gnostic* heretics, particularly from Cerinthus, whom he conceives the evangelist to have designed to refute in this, as in other passages. This, he represents, is intimated by the evangelist himself in ch. 20, v. 31. "These are written," says he, "that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God." Cerinthus had held that Jesus and Christ were two distinct beings; that Jesus was a mere man, and Christ a superior spirit, which was united with Jesus at his baptism, but separated from him before his death on the cross. *Introd. to the N. T.* vol. 3. part 1. p. 281—283. Cambr. 1801. The same term indeed occurs in the philosophy of Plato, but in a different application, for according to the oriental philosophy of emanation the λόγος was a distinct being, derived from the divine essence, but still connected with it, whereas according to Plato it was the reason of God, and the seat of those ideas, or archetypal patterns, according to which all things were made by God. The term had probably been rendered familiar to the Jews by Philo a Jew, born about twenty years before the christian era, who adopted that mixed form of the platonic philosophy, which was taught in Alexandria, and combined it with the religion of Moses. The term *gnostic* was itself borrowed by the orientals from the Greeks, to signify a person, who made pretension to a more perfect knowledge of the divine nature. Paul seems to allude to the appellation in 1 Tim. ch. 6. v. 20, when he cautioned Timothy against "oppositions of science (γνώσεις) falsely so called."

Archdeacon Nares has remarked of the term λόγος, that it appears to have been used to designate our Saviour, not only by John, but also by Luke, in ch. 1. v. 2, as men could not in any other sense of the term be said to be *eye witnesses of the word*. *Horne's Introd.* vol. 4. p. 284, note.

ambiguity, for in the 14th verse of the same chapter it is expressly applied to the person of our Saviour, in that state which preceded his incarnation : “ the word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only-begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.”

In regard to this very direct attestation of the divinity of our Saviour, doctor Bruce has thought it satisfactory to remark, that, in the original language of the New Testament, the term, which we translate by the word *god*, is applied in very various senses, some of them referring to beings of very inferior station. This observation may however be admitted, without in any degree affecting the interpretation of this very remarkable passage.

If there be any rule of sound interpretation, this must be one, that in every sentence, and more especially in a short and emphatical sentence, every word should be so interpreted, that its meaning should remain the same, except so far as the structure of the sentence itself should indicate a change. So inadequate are even the most copious languages to express all the modifications of thought, that it may be impossible to avoid some changes in the significations even of the most important terms ; and indeed, even where such changes might be avoided, it may happen that even a good writer may prefer to apply a term with some

change of signification, relying on the combination of the sentence for rendering that, which he wishes to express, sufficiently intelligible. Still however we must presume, that the meaning is unaltered, unless the necessity of admitting a change can be proved from the passage itself. The supposition of a change of meaning, in the repeated application of the same term of the same sentence, cannot be justified by any consideration of other and independent passages, which might indeed serve to explain the varied use of the term, as a part of the language, but not a variation of its meaning within the compass of any single sentence.

This principle may be well illustrated by the example of the roman orator, though with this important distinction, that the change of signification, which he appears to have freely chosen for the sake of contrast, occurs in the same passage indeed, but in a different sentence. In his oration for the manilian law * he thus pleaded with the people. “ Because

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* Legati quod erant appellati superbius, Corinthum patres vestri, totius Græciæ lumen, extinctum esse voluerunt : vos eum regem inultum esse patiimini, qui legatum populi romani consularem vinculis ac verberibus, atque omni supplicio excruciatum necavit ? Illi libertatem civium romanorum immutatam non tulerunt : vos vitam ereptam negligetis ? Ius legationis verbo violatum illi persecuti sunt : vos legatum populi romani omni supplicio interfectum, inultum relinquetis ? c. 4.

their ambassadors were haughtily addressed, your fathers willed, that Corinth, the light of all Greece, should be extinguished : will you suffer that king to be *unpunished*, who put to death the ambassador of the roman people, a man of consular rank, tortured with bonds, and scourges, and every severity ? They did not permit the liberty of roman citizens to be infringed : will you be indifferent when life has been taken away ? They vindicated the right of an embassy, violated only by a word : will you leave *unrevenged* the ambassador of the roman people, slain with every cruelty ?” In this passage the word *inultum* is used to signify, first *unpunished*, and then *unrevenged* : but the change of signification is apparent from the context. The orator was manifestly influenced by a desire of contrasting more directly the two cases, which he was comparing ; and he was justified in changing the signification of the term, because it is plain that the word must have one signification, as it was applied by a Roman to the enemy of the roman people, and another, as it was applied by the same person to a roman ambassador.

Let a change of signification, such as doctor Bruce has recommended, be admitted in the interpretation of the passage of the evangelist, and let the result be compared with the principle of interpretation, which has been here

stated and illustrated. The term *god*, he remarks, has been applied in the sacred writings to very various subjects, to angels, to men, to heathen idols, and to Satan. The inference, to be naturally drawn from this variation, would appear to be, that the meaning of the term should in each instance be determined from a consideration of the context. The inference of doctor Bruce however is, that the term has no definite signification whatsoever. According to this mode of interpretation we must understand the declaration of the evangelist, in this the solemn opening of his narrative, to have been in its true meaning this : “in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was something called god, whether a being truly so denominated, an angel, a human being, a heathen idol, or Satan.” No one of the various meanings of the term can be selected from the rest, unless the principle of determining the meaning from the context be acknowledged, and this would direct us to the acknowledgment of the divinity of Christ. When we perceive, that the term is applied to any of these inferior subjects, we discover the application from the passage itself. How are we led to such an interpretation in the brief statement of the evangelist? If a vague interpretation, comprehending all meanings, be

nakedly propounded, can it be believed, that an apostle, writing under the influence of divine direction, or even under the guidance of ordinary discretion, could have composed such a sentence, and have prefixed it to his gospel, as a formal and solemn enunciation of the dignity of the being, the incidents of whose ministry he was going to narrate? If this be indeed the fair construction of this introductory sentence, the inference, which would naturally present itself to the mind of a reader, would be, that the man, who could so trifle with his understanding, was unworthy of his attention.

There is no sense, urges doctor Bruce, in saying God was God, and was with God. Neither has it been said by the apostle. He has said "the Word was with God, and the Word was God." The character of the person named the Word was to be determined, and there is no want of sense in saying, that this character was divine. Doctor Bruce indeed appears to have assumed, that the apostle must be understood to represent the Word as identical with the Father, and thus to express one of those unmeaning propositions, in which a term is affirmed of itself. The natural interpretation of the passage is however, that the being named the Word, was not only in the beginning, and with God, but was also himself God,

or a divine being. This interpretation would be yet more distinct, if the passage were more precisely translated, by inserting the demonstrative particle found in the original language ; as “ in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with *the* God, and the Word was God.” The article *the*, thus inserted, indicates the unoriginated self-existent Father, and the Word is described as God, without any such emphatical designation of an underived existence. The apostle however, in announcing the dignity of the Word, did not content himself with simply stating that he was God, but proceeded to describe him as the being by whom all things were made, so that “ without him was not any thing made that was made,” thus attributing to him that creative power, which we cannot conceive to belong to any being less than divine. The object of the apostle was probably to oppose one of the fanciful doctrines of the *gnostic* heretics, who, to account for the origin of evil in the world, ascribed the formation of it to a being distinct from the λόγος, and of an evil, or at least an imperfect nature. But whatever may have been the design of the apostle, we are equally furnished with an argument, which seems to prove decisively the divinity of our Redeemer.

Doctor Bruce however disregards the force of such an inference. He has objected that

the terms used in the original languages do not imply production from nothing, and that we cannot determine, whether a power properly creative may not be communicated. It may be admitted that words are not in any language used with a metaphysical precision, which must incontrovertibly ascertain their application, because in the early period of a language the thoughts of those who speak it, are little abstracted, and as it becomes more improved, the significations of words are multiplied to give expression to the boundless variety of ideas. But we are not destitute of an argument sufficiently cogent, to demonstrate that the apostle here designed to express that which is properly creation, or a production from nothing. The context will here also serve to determine beyond all reasonable controversy the meaning of the apostle. He has not told us, that one thing, or some few things, had been made by the being, whom he has named the Word, but *all things*, and he has added the emphatic declaration, "and without him was not any thing made that was made." It may now be demanded, how could *all things* have been made, except by a power properly creative? It cannot be said that they were formed out of preexistent matter, for that preexistent matter would have been something, and therefore must have been comprehended in the general expression.

Whatever therefore may be in other cases the vagueness of the meaning of the term here translated by the english word *made*, the universality of the declaration of the apostle decides in this case, that it must signify *created* ; nor is there any escape from this conclusion, except by maintaining that matter is eternal and self-existent, and thus denying the creative power even of the Father. The other objection, which implies that possibly a power strictly creative may be imparted to a being not divine, and that therefore such a power cannot furnish a proof of divinity, is happily contradicted both by Moses, who has ascribed the creation exclusively to God, and by Paul, who has, in his speech addressed to the Athenians, repeated the declaration. We are sure therefore that this power has not been so communicated, and consequently we infer that, if it was indeed exercised by our Saviour, as we have been assured by John, he must have participated the divine nature.

One rule of interpretation has been proposed, namely, that in the same sentence we should presume that the same word must, in recurring, bear the same signification, except so far as some change may be indicated by the context. Another principle of sound interpretation is * that, in ancient compo-

* This principle appears to have been adopted by the

sitions, the meaning of words addressed to any persons, may often be best collected from the impressions, which these words appear to have made on those persons, when they were spoken. It cannot often from any analogy of language be so surely determined, what was their true and proper acceptation, as from observing in what sense they were actually understood at the time by the persons, to whose understandings they must be supposed to have been accommodated by the speaker. This principle, which approves itself to our reason in ordinary cases, is irresistibly evident when applied to the discourses of him, who knew the secret thoughts of the heart, and could reply to them before they had found utterance in language. Mere mortals indeed, however desirous of being understood, may sometimes fail to convey their ideas to their hearers, because they may be ignorant of those mental prejudices, through which they are frequently received ; but that being, who “ needed not that any should testify of man, because he knew what was in man,” could not be so deceived, and must have been able to communicate with clearness and precision,

bishop of St. Davids in several tracts, to which reference has been made by archbishop Magee, in his *Discourses and Dissertations on Atonement and Sacrifice*, vol. 2. part 2. p. 40, note, London 1816 ; and also by Mr. Wilson, to whose work reference has also been made in the same passage.

all which he desired to be known. If then we would truly understand the communications, which our Saviour made concerning his own nature to his countrymen, we should consider, not so much how we should now understand his words, as how they were originally understood by his Jewish hearers, to whom they were immediately addressed. For them they were primarily intended by a being, who knew unerringly how they would be received.

This principle indeed, though thus generally just, admits, like the former, a certain modification, to be discovered in the same manner from the context. We know from the sacred writings, that our Saviour did not deem it in all cases expedient to manifest himself to those, by whom he was surrounded, requiring frequently that the persons, who had been relieved by his miraculous power, should not divulge the wonders, which they had experienced in their deliverance. In the same spirit also he informed his disciples that "to them it was given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God, but to others in parables." On many of the Jews a distinct knowledge of his claim of a divine character could not have had a salutary influence, and it might even have had the contrary effect of exasperating their hostility, and thus of exciting them to disturb his ministry by violence, and to

abridge it by hastening his death. Consistently with conduct so cautiously accommodated to the dispositions of his hearers, it may have happened that he would not in some cases choose to assert his pretension to a divine character, even in reply to a direct enquiry. But no inference against the divinity of his character can be made from this reserve, if it should appear that in such cases, he did not disclaim the pretension which they imputed to him, but merely avoided to give a distinct reply, which would but have inflamed their violence.

The same evangelist, who began his narrative with a formal statement of the divinity of Jesus Christ, and with asserting that he had been the creator of all things, hath recorded various conversations, in which he was understood by his jewish hearers to claim a divine character. These, agreeably to the principle of interpretation which has been just now proposed, must be considered as affording direct and undeniable proof, that he did truly claim to be God, unless it can be shown, that he distinctly rejected and condemned the interpretation.

In the fifth chapter we are informed, that "the Jews sought the more to kill him, because he not only had broken the sabbath" by curing the impotent man at the pool of Bethesda, "but said also that God was his

(*ἰδίου* *own*) father, making himself equal with God." Here we have a distinct intimation, that the Jews understood our Saviour to have asserted, that he was the Son of God in that peculiar sense, expressed by the word *ἰδίου*, which would have constituted him equal with God. Did Jesus on this occasion, on which his own life was exposed to the most imminent danger, disown the character, which their inference had ascribed to him? Did he assure them, that they had drawn an unauthorised conclusion from his words, and that, though he had spoken of God as his Father, he desired to be considered only as a ministering angel, though of the highest order? He did indeed represent, that he had derived all things from the Father; but in every other respect it appears to have been his object, to impress them with a persuasion, that there existed between himself and his Father a perfect community of nature. He even adds strength to the inference, which they had already drawn, by assuring them that, by the same derived power, he would perform yet more considerable miracles to excite their astonishment. "For the Father," says he, "loveth the Son, and sheweth him all things that himself doeth: and he will shew him greater works than these, that ye may marvel." He did not indeed in express terms assert that he was God. This was unnecessary,

for the Jews had already so understood his claim to be considered as the Son of God. Perhaps it was not consistent with his actual condition, in which he had assumed our nature, having *emptied himself*, as the * apostle has said, of the majesty belonging to *the form of God*, in which he had “thought it not robbery to be equal with God.” But, while he disclaimed the interpretation of the Jews only so far, as to acknowledge that all his powers were received by him from the Father, he magnified the dignity of that filial relation, the claim of which they had understood to imply equality with God. He informed them that “the Father had committed all judgment unto the Son, that all men should honour the Son even as they honour the Father.”

It is indeed alleged that our Saviour, in saying “the Son can do nothing of himself,” refutes the opinion of his equality to God : but since he has not disclaimed that equality, which had been attributed to him by the Jews, as a blasphemy deserving death, the fair conclusion seems rather to be, that, while he acknowledged their inference of his equality, he took care to apprise them, that it was not an equality constituting an independent divinity. Our Saviour, according to this interpretation, does not disclaim his own divinity, but asserts

* Epistle to the Philippians, ch. 2. v. 6, 7, 8. The words translated *made himself of no reputation*, should rather have been so rendered, being in the original *ἐκένωσας*.

the unity of the divine nature ; and the interpretation is confirmed by the verse already cited, in which it is stated to have been the will of the Father, that the Son should be honoured as himself.

It is further urged that the word *καθώς*, translated in this verse by the words *even as*, never, in the language of this apostle, signifies an exact equality, but only a general similitude ; and to establish this position a reference is made to the seventeenth chapter, verses 11, 14, 21, 23. That the word is used thus loosely in the cited passages, may however be admitted, without at all affecting the question now under consideration. The true meaning of the word seems to be a similitude as close as the respective natures of the things compared can be conceived to admit, and consequently it must vary in its precision according to its application. In comparing the unity of christians with that of the Father and Son in the holy trinity, it may therefore admit one degree of laxity, 'accommodated to the things compared ; in comparing the alienation of true christians from the corrupt pursuits of the world with that of Jesus Christ, a different degree, on account of the distinctness of this case of comparison ; in comparing the love of the Father towards christians with his love towards his own Son, yet a third. The meaning of the word therefore, since it depends on the appli-

cation, must be such a similitude as is suitable to the objects then considered. In the present instance we should reflect that there is an inference of equality not disclaimed, qualified however by a declaration of the derived powers of the Son. The just conclusion appears therefore to be, that in this case the word implies a similitude of honour as perfect, as can be addressed to two divine persons, one self-existent, the other derivative. The modification here suggested, as alone in this case admissible, is most happily expressed in that part of the communion-service of the established church, in which Christ is addressed, as, with the Holy Ghost, "most high in the glory of God the Father."

We are informed in the tenth chapter of this gospel, that the Jews demanded of him an explicit answer, whether he were the Christ, and that they stoned him for blasphemy, because that in his reply he had, as they understood him, represented himself as God. The reply of the Jews, when he had upbraidingly asked them, for which of his many good works they proceeded to this outrage, drew from him a justification, which doctor Bruce has represented as renouncing the divine character. A fair consideration will probably be thought to lead to a contrary conclusion. "Jesus answered them, is it not written in your law, I said, ye are gods. If he called them gods, unto

whom the word of God came, and the scripture cannot be broken ; say ye of him, whom the Father hath sanctified, and sent into the world, thou blasphemest ; because I said, I am the Son of God." Concerning these words doctor Bruce has urged, that our Saviour, when charged with making himself God, is so far from asserting his equality, that he refutes the accusation, by reminding the Jews, that in the scripture those were called gods, to whom the word of God came. Our Saviour did not however, as is here implied, content himself with simply reminding the Jews of this application of the term, but reasoned from it in the manner, which by logicians has been denominated an argument *a fortiori*, or one in which the inference is drawn from a case of more extended application. The argument may thus be distinctly stated. If they have been in the scripture called gods, to whom the word of God came, I may much rather claim the appellation, whom the Father hath sanctified and sent into the world. To have directly and expressly asserted his claim to the offensive appellation of the Son of God, in its true and appropriate meaning, would but have yet more inflamed the violence of those, who had then the third time assailed him with stones, on a mere inference from other and more general expressions. Into this extremity accordingly he did not allow

himself to be driven. He repeated the assertion, that he was the Son of God ; and he strengthened it by assuring the Jews, that so intimate was the union of the Father and himself, that he was in the Father, and the Father in him. Having done this, he shunned to claim in its most offensive sense the obnoxious appellation, leaving his pretension to be vaguely inferred from a more extended application of the term. His purpose appears to have been, as on another occasion, to silence the Jews from their own scriptures, and at the same time to avoid making a specific declaration, which would have again exposed him to their utmost fury. It must however be observed, that a distinct answer is given to the question originally asked in the conversation, namely, whether he was the Christ.

That the conduct of our Saviour was in this case influenced by a prudent consideration of his safety, appears from the approbation which he afterwards expressed, when the appellation even of God was bestowed upon him by Thomas, convinced at length of the reality of his resurrection. “ My Lord and my God ” was the emphatic exclamation of the apostle, satisfied that his doubts were wholly unfounded. Did our Saviour disclaim the appellation, as exceeding his just pretensions, and reprove his follower for the extravagance, into which he had been hurried by his new conviction ?

Far otherwise, he merely contrasted the slow and unwilling belief of Thomas with the faith of those, who had not enjoyed a similar opportunity. "Jesus saith unto him, Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed." The bigoted malice of the Jews had then done its worst, and no reason could exist for declining an acknowledgment of his divine character, especially in a company of his faithful and attached followers. An attempt has indeed been made to evade the force of the declaration of Thomas, by representing it as a vague expression of amazement, addressed to God the Father, and not to Christ; but this interpretation is inconsistent with the words of the evangelist, "and Thomas answered, and said unto him, my Lord and my God," which describe him as addressing his master. The attempt, as in other cases, proves the importance of the testimony according to its direct and natural construction.

From the two conversations held with the Jews, we are authorized to conclude, that these understood our Saviour, in calling himself the Son of God, to have represented himself as possessed of a divine nature; and from the exclamation of Thomas, approved as it was by the reply of his master, we may infer, not only that the interpretation of the Jews was correct, but also that our Saviour, in avoiding to assume

expressly the character of divinity, had been influenced by a consideration of prudence, which in that case had no operation. Doctor Bruce, who has overlooked the construction of the Jews, not content with depriving the term *god* of all appropriate meaning, has proceeded to remark, that the epithets *only* and *only-begotten*, which are connected with the title of *Son of God*, import merely pre-eminence and affection. If however it has been sufficiently shown, that the title itself implied the possession of a divine nature, and we cannot dispute this with the Jews, to whom it was addressed, there can be no room for any attempt to reduce the import of the accompanying epithets.

The gospel of John appears to have been written especially to vindicate the divinity of Christ from the errors of some sects, which even then had formed unworthy notions of his nature, and is accordingly, particularly in the commencement, more explicit than the rest in its statements on this subject. This gospel likewise alone contains an account of those instances of the violence of the Jews, which prove their sense of the appellation of *the Son of God*. But it is remarkable that the three other gospels do all contain a narrative of a transaction not mentioned by John, in which the Jews indignantly inferred a claim of divinity, and the claim was not disowned by our Saviour. John, having much peculiar to his

own narrative to communicate, probably judged it unnecessary to repeat a story already recorded by three evangelists.

When a man afflicted with palsy had been brought to our Saviour, to be relieved by his miraculous power, he chose, instead of performing the expected miracle, to declare that the sins of the sick man were forgiven, apparently with the intention of affording an ocular demonstration, that he did really possess a power of forgiving sins, which was understood to belong exclusively to the divine nature. The Jews accordingly reasoned in their own minds on the blasphemy of such a pretension, asking themselves, who except God could exercise such a power. To excite this sentiment of surprise appears to have been his object, for, instead of explaining away the words, which he had just uttered, by interpreting them to have been only declaratory of the forgiveness of a higher being, he immediately informed them that he would convince them, that he *the Son of Man*, in human nature as he then was, did actually possess this power, which they considered as an attribute of divinity. He first appealed to their own reason, "whether is it easier to say, thy sins be forgiven thee, or to say, arise and walk;" and then in their presence, that, as he said, they might know that he possessed the power which he had claimed, performed by a word the miracle, which he had just intimated

to have been an equivalent indication of his true character. The sentiment of the Jews, that our Saviour, in professing to forgive sins, had claimed the divine nature, was thus adopted by our Saviour himself. We are therefore not left to draw the conclusion, that he who assumed this power, must be God: he has by his own conduct sanctioned the inference, and we must receive it as his testimony.

If we now turn particularly to Matthew, who, like John, was an apostle, we shall find other corroborating attestations of the divinity of Christ.

In the first chapter we find the name *Emmanuel* applied to our Saviour, and interpreted to signify *God with us*. Those who deny his divinity, have indeed contended, that this should be understood to mean only, that God designed to do great things by his agency. It is however certain that, though, as has been urged in support of this interpretation, the name of Jehovah has been introduced into the composition of appellations bestowed upon places, which had been distinguished by his immediate presence, and though God has been frequently in the sacred writings said to be with those, whom he particularly favoured, yet in no other instance has the appellation *Emmanuel*, or any of equivalent import, been attributed in the scriptures to an individual as his characteristic title: and

if we should admit that, in the prophecy of Isaiah, the term was applied primarily to a different individual, yet, since the prophecy has been declared by the apostolic evangelist, to have been fulfilled in Jesus Christ, we should regard that individual, as receiving it only in reference to the more illustrious person, whom he typified. Indeed if it had been designed to express only, that this person was particularly favoured by God, the name should have been so constructed, as to signify *God with him*, rather than *God with us*.

It might perhaps naturally be expected, that Jesus Christ would speak more explicitly on the mysterious subject of his nature, to those who had devoted themselves to his service, than to the multitudes who followed him to behold his miracles, or to the adversaries who were disposed only to cavil at his doctrine. On them however he appears to have been more solicitous to press the doctrine of his humiliation and suffering, as least acceptable to those, who, though they had acknowledged him to be the Messiah, yet still, with the prejudices of their country, speculated on a temporal deliverer. But, though he seems on this account to have been generally reserved in regard to this subject with his immediate followers, he did not omit to afford them such information, as they, with the other

Jews, would understand to signify, that he was truly God.

In a private conversation "he asked his disciples, saying, whom do men say that I, the son of man, am?" What do they conceive of the true and original character of me, who am thus presented to their observation in the form of human nature? When they had reported to him the various opinions entertained concerning his person by the multitude, he proceeded to enquire, what notion of him they themselves had formed. In reply to this question "Simon Peter answered and said, thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." From passages already considered we know with certainty, that by such a declaration a Jew must have intended to express his conviction of the true divinity of the person, whom he addressed. It was on the other hand accepted by our Saviour, as an acknowledgment of a truth, which divine revelation alone could have communicated. "Blessed," said he, "art thou Simon Bar-jona, for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father, which is in heaven."

The time at length arrived, when the great mystery of the divine character of Christ might be published to the Jews, and when indeed it had become necessary to the purpose of his mission, that this character should be solemnly asserted. Though he had not deign-

ed to answer to the testimony of the false witnesses, produced against him to justify his condemnation, yet when he was adjured by the high-priest to declare, whether he was the Christ, the Son of God, he replied affirmatively, knowing certainly that his answer would be received, as a formal assumption of a divine character. Even an explicit affirmation indeed he appears to have thought not sufficient for the solemnity of this concluding scene, and therefore to have strengthened it by a declaration of that heavenly exaltation, which should be manifested to the persons then present, in the effects of his power. "Nevertheless I say unto you, hereafter shall ye see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven." The effect of this answer was, that "the high-priest rent his clothes, saying, he hath spoken blasphemy." The answer was fully understood by him to signify, that the person who stood then before him, did indeed claim to be a divine being ; and we must believe that, given as it was in reply to a solemn adjuration, and when that person was going to complete his mission by his sufferings and death, it was designed to convey the meaning, according to which it was actually understood.

Nor does the testimony of Matthew, concerning the divinity of Jesus Christ, end with his narrative of this most interesting trial. The

evangelist has also informed us of the commission, by which, after his resurrection, he directed his eleven disciples, to go and teach all nations, "baptizing them in the name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost." In this commission we find the names of the Son and of the Holy Ghost united with that of the Father, and the natural construction is that, like the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost are also divine.

Doctor Bruce has remarked, that the agents in the revelation of the gospel are mentioned in this commission as three distinct parties, and that there is no allusion to their co-equality. That they are mentioned as distinct parties we hold; and that there is no express allusion to their co-equality is manifest: but that is a strange interpretation, which supposes the name of the Almighty Father to be associated in the initiatory form of his revelation with those of any other beings less than divine. The disciple, says doctor Bruce, is to be baptized into that religion, which proceeded from the grace of God Almighty, was published and taught by the Messiah, his well-beloved Son, and afterwards propagated by the influence of the Holy Spirit. But this is not an adequate interpretation of this important form. To be baptized in the name of any person, is not merely to be baptized into a religion, in the introduction of which that person was

somehow engaged ; it is not merely an historical acknowledgment of the concern, which that person had in communicating it to the world ; it is a devotement of the soul to such a person, an acknowledgment of his absolute and entire dominion. The apostle Paul has indeed* said, that the Israelites had been “all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea :” but this is merely a typical illustration of a remarkable event, not a form of actual initiation ; and the name of Moses, standing thus simply by itself, may naturally be understood to signify the religion, which he had taught, and continued to maintain. There was in this case no real baptism, nor was the name of any inferior being conjoined with that of Jehovah.

To have a just conception however of this initiatory form, it is necessary that we should consider the expressions of our Saviour, by which it was preceded and followed ; these will abundantly prove, that the Son was not introduced under any inferiority of character. The words immediately preceding contain a declaration, that all power had been given to him in heaven and in earth ; and on this declaration the commission itself was founded, “go ye therefore,” says he, “and teach all nations.” The words immediately following contain this assurance, “lo, I am with you alway, even unto

* 1 Cor. ch. 10. v. 2.

the end of the world," or, as it might be translated, to the completion of time ; an assurance given more particularly in regard to place, as here in regard to time, in another* passage of the same gospel, "where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them."

The almighty power, thus asserted by our Saviour, is indeed said to have been *given* to him ; and it may perhaps be thence concluded, that the preeminent dignity of his character was not inherent, but conferred. The same evangelist however, thought† he has described him as coming to judgment "in the glory of his Father with his angels," has yet, in another‡ passage, represented him as coming "in his own glory, and all the holy angels with him ;" and Luke§ has combined in one enumeration all the circumstances of his dignity, saying that "he shall come in his own glory, and in his Father's, and of the holy angels." Christ is thus pronounced to possess a glory, at once distinct from that of angels, who should form his train, and also from that conferred upon him by his Father as the reward of his obedience and humiliation, a glory superior to that of the angels, and originally belonging to him as the Son of God. He is accordingly represented by

* Matt. ch. 18. v. 20. † Ibid. ch. 16. v. 27. ‡ Ibid. ch. 25. v. 31. § Luke, ch. 9. v. 26.

John,* to have prayed to his Father for the restoration of his primitive glory. “And now, O Father,” said he, “glorify thou me with thine own self, with the glory which I had with thee before the world was.”

The solemn benediction, which has been adopted into our liturgy from the conclusion of the second epistle of Paul to the Corinthians, justifies and confirms this interpretation of the baptismal form, for the same three persons are mentioned in it together, as beings whose favour or assistance is to be implored, and our lord Jesus Christ is even mentioned in the first place, probably as the head of the christian church.

In reviewing the testimony thus borne by the evangelists to the divinity of Christ, we find that by one, who was also an apostle, and his loved companion, he was expressly pronounced to be God; that, according to the narrative of the same evangelist, the Jews, on two different occasions, proved by their violence, that they understood the title of Son of God to imply a divine character, which inference, though not expressly affirmed, was yet not denied by our Saviour; and that our Saviour did expressly sanction by his acquiescence the exclamation of Thomas, which directly acknowledged his divinity: we find also in the narratives of the three other evangelists a relation of a transaction, in

* John, ch. 17. v. 5.

which our Saviour asserted his power of forgiving sin, and when this pretension had been internally censured by the Jews, as a blasphemous assumption of a divine attribute, vindicated it by a miraculous cure : and lastly, in the narrative of the other apostolic evangelist, we find that a prophetic appellation was bestowed on our Saviour, which naturally implies, that he was a divine being incarnate in our nature; that, when he had privately questioned his disciples concerning their opinion of his nature, he expressed his entire approbation of the answer of Peter, which, in the judgment of the Jews, implied equality with God; that to the solemn adjuration of the high-priest at his trial, he not only returned an affirmative answer, which he knew would be so understood, but also strengthened by various circumstances of description the impression, which he must have expected it to make; and that, in his last interview with his immediate followers after his resurrection, he gave them his solemn commission in terms, by which he associated himself with the Almighty Father, assuring them at the same time, that he possessed all power both in heaven and in earth, and that he should be with them to the end of time, which last assurance was in another passage expressly extended to ubiquity.

Metaphysical science has in vain endeavoured to penetrate to a knowledge of the substances of corporeal and incorporeal being, and we are

compelled to acquiesce in an acquaintance with the several properties, which body and spirit present to our observation. No man, it is presumed, will contend, that from a divine revelation an enlargement of speculative science is to be expected. The revelations of God may be expected to communicate to us such information concerning his nature and government, as is important to the moral regulation of our actions, and yet is not discoverable by the faculties, with which we are naturally endowed ; but the enlargement of mere science must be conceived to be limited to the attainments of those faculties themselves, since we must believe that they were accommodated to the present circumstances of our nature, however inadequate to guide us in the way to the attainment of eternal happiness. Our Saviour has accordingly delivered no lecture on the natures of substances, distinguishing the perfect essence of the self-existent God from that of his dependent and imperfect, though reasonable creatures ; but taking human knowledge in this respect as he found it, limited to the consideration of the properties and powers of things, while it is debarred from all acquaintance with their essential being, he has designated the divinity of his own character only by those properties and powers, which no human imagination can conceive to belong to any created existence.

Christ has asserted the power of forgiving sins in the presence of men, who held that it was an attribute of God alone ; and he assured his followers of his personal presence, not restrained by those limits of time and space, which control the agency of the most exalted creatures. The latter consideration is of itself decisive. God alone can be at the same moment present every where, to assist the devotions of all assembled in the name of their Redeemer.

In the apostolic epistles also there are passages so directly bearing upon this question, that they must be cited in this place, in disregard of the principle, by which doctor Bruce would exclude from consideration that large and important portion of the writings comprehended in the New Testament.

The first of these, which shall be mentioned is the fifth verse of the ninth chapter of the epistle to the Romans ; “ whose are the fathers, and of whom, as concerning the flesh, Christ came, who is over all, God blessed for ever.” This passage was however too decisive of the divine character of Christ, to be permitted to remain, without some efforts to embarrass the obvious interpretation. In contradiction * to all authority it has been contended, that the word *God* is not authentic. This position being not tenable, it has been proposed to separate the

*Archbishop Magee on Atonement and Sacrifice, vol. 2. part 2, p. 114, etc.

concluding words, "God blessed for ever," from those which preceded, and to understand them as a distinct ejaculation of gratitude to God for the mission of Jesus Christ. This also has been abandoned, and a third attempt has been made to destroy the force of the passage by transposing two words, and so altering one of them, that, instead of "who is over all, God blessed for ever," it should signify "of whom is God over all, blessed for ever." This last emendation has been produced by Mr. Belsham, the present leader of the socinians, from an old socinian named Slichtingius. From the socinians it appears to have been adopted by doctor Bruce, since he says to his hearers, "you could not refrain from smiling, when you heard the nature of the Supreme Being, and the faith and salvation of Christendom, suspended on *the transposition of a letter*, or the construction of a particle, the insertion of a dot, or *the omission of some grammatical or rhetorical mark*. These several emendations have been critically examined and exposed by archbishop Magee. To his remark, that in bringing forward the last the others have been abandoned, it seems necessary only to add, that even the last will after all afford no meaning applicable to any other being than Christ, for surely it cannot in any sense be said, that God the Father is "of the Israelites."

In the first epistle to Timothy, ch. 3. v. 16, we find another remarkable passage, which, like the preceding, has been the subject of a critical controversy; "and without controversy, great is the mystery of godliness; God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory." The controversy is whether the word signifying *God* should not be rejected as spurious, and the greek article, signifying *which* or *who*, substituted in its place as the genuine text. The genuineness of the received text, which distinctly asserts the divinity of Christ, is strongly defended by bishop Pearson.* It may be further remarked, that the relative *which* does not agree with what follows, for *the mystery of godliness*, to which it must refer, cannot be said to have been *received up into glory*; and that the relative *who*, intelligible only in relation to Christ, has no corresponding antecedent in the passage.

We find in the second chapter of the epistle to the Philippians a detailed description of the character of Christ, from which, however it may be interpreted, his divinity may be satisfactorily inferred. Whether we adhere to the received translation, "who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God," or adopt one of those, which have been

* Exposition of the Creed, p. 128, Lond. 1701.

proposed to be substituted in its place, representing this equality as not eagerly desired by Christ, we must consider as possessed of a character not inferior to divinity, the being, who is declared to have been in the form of God, and either to have deemed himself equal with God, according to the one interpretation, or according to the other, to have voluntarily foregone that pretension, in *emptying himself*, for so should the words *ἑαυτὸν ἐκένωσε* in the following verse be translated, that he might in a human form submit to humiliation and suffering. The expression which has been thus variously interpreted, appears to have been used by the apostle, with the design of magnifying by contrast the humiliation described in the succeeding verse, and therefore should fairly be regarded as intended to bear a signification, applicable to a nature as eminently exalted, as the words would naturally imply.

If it should be imagined that the words *the form of God* cannot be understood to signify strictly a participation of the divine nature, but must be limited to some imperfect resemblance of divinity, it should be recollected that, by a similar interpretation we must conclude, contrary to the express and repeated declaration of the scriptures, that neither was he truly man, the same term being applied to his human condition, and in this case even explained by the succeeding term translated *likeness*.

Three different terms have been applied by the apostle Paul to our Saviour, for expressing the correspondence existing between his proper nature and that of the Father. In the passage now considered the term is *μορφῇ*, translated by the word *form*: in the epistle to the Colossians, ch. 1. v. 15, the term is *εἰκὼν*, which is rendered *image*: and in the epistle to the Hebrews, ch. 1. v. 3. it is *χαρακτήρ*, interpreted to signify *the express image*. These all seem to be equivalent descriptions of the original character of our Redeemer, and therefore whatever consideration may throw light on the meaning of any one, must be regarded as equally illustrating the others. If then each be separately examined in its relation to the context of the passage, in which it occurs, means may be found for determining with sufficient precision the common signification of all. This is not to found an argument on the significations of single terms, which must be various, and are perceived to be so in every good dictionary; but it is to argue merely from a persuasion, that an inspired writer must in each sentence, which he wrote, have designed to express some consistent and coherent meaning.

Of the first term *μορφῇ* it has been already shown that, since in its application to the human condition of our Redeemer, it must be understood to denote the assumption of the real

nature of man, so in its application to his pre-existent state, it must unavoidably be conceived to indicate, not merely the semblance, but the reality of the divine nature. To understand the term in one part of the sentence, as applied to the divine nature, in one sense, and in a different one in the latter, when the design of the writer manifestly was to oppose the exaltation which it implies in the one, to the humiliation which it denotes in the other, would be to violate the rule of interpretation established in the beginning of this treatise.

The term *εἰκὼν*, the second of the three terms, is immediately connected with the words *πρωτότοκος πάσης κτίσεως*, which, when correctly translated, may furnish its interpretation. These words have been translated "the first born of every creature ;" but a little consideration will discover that this translation, at least in any obvious acceptance, is not consistent with the context of the passage, and that the true meaning is *the forebegotten of all creation*, or *the begotten before all creation*.

The obvious meaning of the received translation must either be that Jesus Christ was *the first offspring of all creation*, which appellation could be attributed to him only in that sense, in which, in the very same passage, he is said to be "the first-born from the dead ;" or that he was *the first being produced among*

all created things. Let each of these acceptations be separately examined in comparison with the remainder of the passage.

We find that the words now under consideration are immediately followed by a very detailed description of the creation of the world, as ascribed to this being, and this expressly to account for, and explain those very words: "*for* by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him: and he is before all things, and by him all things consist." A description so particular and emphatical can relate only to the natural creation, especially as the same being is in the next verse described as "the first-born from the dead," to complete the high distinctions of his nature, or, as the apostle says, "that in all things he might have the preeminence." We must therefore dismiss from our consideration that acceptation of the received version, which would represent our Saviour as the first offspring of all creation.

The character of creator, which is in this passage so distinctly attributed to Jesus Christ, is not less inconsistent with that other acceptation, which would represent him as the first-formed of all created things. How is it to be understood that the creator was himself a part, though the first part, of a system of beings,

all the parts of which he himself had created, before the formation of all which he had existed, and the combination of which he continued to support. But there is in this case moreover a peculiar difficulty in the distinction of the terms. Why should a term implying generation be employed to denote the origin of Jesus Christ, and another term, signifying simply creation, be used to express that of all other beings, if Jesus Christ were to be understood to be merely created, like the others, and differing in this respect only by priority? Why should he be described as the *first-born* or *first-begotten*, instead of being said to be *first-created*?

The writer of this treatise is not the first person, who has been dissatisfied with the received version, for * doctor Blomfield, to remove the difficulty, has suggested that the words might be translated *the first producer* of the whole creation. But, besides that the original term, in the sense of production, rather signifies a parent which hath produced her first off-spring, what can be understood by the first producer of a system of created things? Can such a system have had different and successive authors?

The true meaning seems to be discoverable in the word *πρῶτος*, the former part of the com-

* Five Lectures on the Gospel of St. John, p. 10. Lond. 1823.

pound term, and to this the grammatical connection of the term must be referred, since it has been shown, that every sense resulting from the connection of the latter part *τόκος* with the succeeding words, is inadmissible. It has been remarked by † Vigerus, that the superlative *πρῶτός* has been thrice used by the apostle John as a comparative governing a genitive case. In the first chapter of his gospel, v. 15 and 30, we find, in the original of the words “for he was before me,” this word followed by *μου*; and in the fifteenth chapter, v. 18, we in the like manner find *πρῶτον ὑμῶν*. If this use of the word *πρῶτός* be considered as preserved in the compound term *πρωτότοκος*, followed as this is by a genitive case, the translation will be, as has been stated, *the begotten before all creation*, a form of words which at once preserves the priority of the creator compared with the works of creation, and marks the distinctness of his origination from that of created beings. In these words, thus, it is believed, accurately interpreted, we find the true meaning of those immediately preceding, in which Jesus Christ is denominated “the image of the invisible God;” he is the image of God, as being generated from his own nature in a manner distinct from creation, as it was anterior in time.

† De Præcipuis Græcæ Dictionis Idiotismis, p. 67, not. Lips. 1789.

The remaining passage, in which our Saviour is described as “ the express image of his person,” or of the person of God, or rather, as it should be translated, *the impressed image of his substance*, corresponds very accurately to that which has been just considered. The term *χαρακτήρ*, interpreted “ express,” or rather impressed, “ image,” is plainly equivalent to the word *εἰκὼν* interpreted “ image” in the other passage ; and the term *ὑποστάσις*, which is here translated “ person,” may more properly be translated *substance*, as is done in the first verse of the eleventh chapter of the same epistle. Here then we have again presented to us the same notion of the communication of the divine nature to Jesus Christ, in the use of a term synonymous to one already so expounded in the epistle to the Colossians.

The remainder of the chapter is employed in proving, how much more exalted than the nature of angels is that which Christ “ hath by inheritance obtained.” With this view it is remarked, that the appellation of the Son of God had never been bestowed by the Almighty upon any of the angelic order, with so much particularity and emphasis, as to denote that he was peculiarly a Son by generation ; that the angels had been required to offer him their worship, when he was brought into the world by his Father ; that the Father had addressed the Son as God, whose throne endureth for ever ;

that the being thus exalted had created all things, and should endure for ever unchanged, when the material heavens had perished from existence; and that, while the angels are all ministering spirits, he should be seated in triumph at the right hand of the Father. Expressions indeed occur in this very passage, which appear to separate Christ from all participation of the divine nature, however highly he is represented as exalted above angelic beings. God is termed "his God," and the angels are named "his fellows." These however may be satisfactorily explained by remarking, that these words are not primarily the language of the writer of the epistle, but are a part of a prediction of the psalmist, quoted by him in testimony of the eminent dignity of Christ. As a distinct exposition of the exalted nature of Christ would in the time of David have too much anticipated the promulgation of christianity, the communication could be made only in reference to some typical representation. It has accordingly been made in language partly characteristic of Solomon, as a type of the Messiah, and consequently containing some expressions not properly applicable to the latter, as it also contains others, which may not be at all applied to the former.

In this discussion the controverted passage in the first epistle of John has not been urged as an authority against the arian doctrine, because

none should be so alleged, against which any reasonable objection could be pleaded. But the case of the two controverted passages already adduced, from the epistle to the Romans, ch. 9. v. 5, and from the first epistle to Timothy, ch. 3. v. 16, is very different. On these the ingenuity of conjectural criticism has been exercised, apparently for no other reason, than that the received text is in each decisively favourable to the doctrine of the divinity of Jesus Christ. These therefore should be by no means relinquished in argument, since the objections urged against the received readings seem to have arisen only from a sense of their importance.

The apocalypse, whatever difficulties may be found in interpreting its predictions, presents none in its declarations of the character and majesty of the head of the christian church. "I am * alpha and omega, the beginning and the ending, saith the Lord, which is, and which was, and which is to come, the Almighty." These words admit no other interpretation, than that they describe a divine being, for the description which they compose, is formed of the ideas of creation, of permanent and unvaried being, and of omnipotence. The character of Jesus Christ too is in the same book connected with that divinity, which the apostle John had attributed to him in the beginning of his gospel, for in † another passage we read "his name is called the Word of God."

* Revelation, ch. 1. v. 8.

† Ibid. ch. 19. v. 13.

If we now direct our view from the New to the Old Testament, we are, in the very commencement of the sacred record, and in the narrative of the exercise of the creative power of God, surprised by * observing that those scriptures, in which the unity of God is most emphatically asserted, designate the divinity by words of a plural form without any apparent necessity. Nor does this sort of expression occur only in the name of God; for it is retained in the pronouns, which are substituted for that name; and there is one passage in which the pronoun so used must be understood to denote an absolute plurality; “and the Lord God said, behold the man is become as one of us—” That the plural form was not used through necessity, may be concluded from the use of the singular in other passages, as in Deuteronomy, ch. 32. v. 15, 17. In the passage here cited from Deuteronomy the singular seems to have been employed, because the true God is opposed to the divinities of pagan polytheism, whereas in the narrative of the creation Moses may have felt himself at liberty to employ terms, which might best correspond to the nature of the Deity. This indeed appears to have been yet more distinctly expressed, when the name Jehovah had been revealed, this name being very frequently combined with the plural term signifying *God*, as if to denote by the one the unity, and by the other the plurality of the divine nature. Can we

* Bishop Tomline's Elem. of Christ. Theol. vol. 2. p. 75-82. Lond. 1818.

suppose, that this language has been casually adopted? Is it not much more reasonable to conclude, as has been commonly done, that the plural form has been employed, to intimate to man, even from the beginning of the divine communications, that a plurality does exist in the divine essence, and thus to prepare him for that fuller declaration, which was to be made to him in the gospel? It was not a mode of expression borrowed from the phraseology of human dignity, for the language of Pharaoh in the same book is always in the singular number.

Even in the historical part of the Old Testament, though relating directly to the establishment of the Jewish religion, we * find a distinct mention of two beings, to each of whom the name Jehovah is attributed. From the prophecies we might expect some more explicit information. The argument in proof of the divinity of Jesus Christ accordingly receives a powerful aid from two very remarkable passages; the one contained in Isaiah, ch. 9, v. 6, the other in Zechariah, ch. 18, v. 7. In the former of these the prophet, who has been appropriately named evangelical, as he has most particularly characterised the christian covenant of mercy, seems to have laboured to find language adequate to express the dignity of the being, whose human birth he was then predicting, and among the epithets, by which he endeavours to give expression to his lofty conceptions, we find that this great being is described even as a "mighty God." The passage

* Genesis, ch. 19, v. 24.

of Zechariah contains words, which, in a very remarkable manner, at once declare the divinity, and foretel the incarnation of Christ: “awake, O sword, against my shepherd, and against *the man that is my fellow*.” It is here intimated by the prophet, that God permitted the violence of the Jews to be exercised against the Redeemer, who is however at the same time described as both a *man*, and the *fellow* of his God.

Nor is the testimony of the Jewish scriptures, in regard to the divinity of Jesus Christ, confined to those passages of the prophecies, which contain a manifest allusion to his person, for we have the authority of an apostle for * regarding him as the same being, who, under the name of Jehovah, was the superintendant of the Jewish dispensation. Paul, in † these words, “whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord, shall be saved,” appears to quote ‡ the prophet Joel, who speaks in the like manner of Jehovah ; and more directly

* Bishop Pearson has shown that even the Jews have attributed the name Jehovah to the Messiah from this particular text; “this is his name whereby he shall be called, the Lord (Jehovah) our righteousness.” Jeremiah, ch. 23, v. 9. Exposition of the Creed, p. 148, 149. Lond. 1701. The same opinion was also constantly held by the earlier fathers, and was embraced by bishop Bull, who says, *ubicunque non merum angelum, sed ipsum Deum apparuisse liquet, ibi non Patrem, sed Filium intelligendum esse primævæ antiquitatis consentiens judicium religiose sequentes constanter affirmamus.* Sect. 4. c. 3. §. 15, p. 246. Lond. 1721. This persuasion seems to afford the best prospect of converting the Jews to christianity, as it connects the two dispensations under the agency of the same being.

† Ep. to the Rom. ch. 10. v. 13. ‡ Ch. 2. v. 32.

in * another passage, “ neither let us tempt Christ, as some of them also tempted, and were destroyed of serpents,” he speaks of Christ as the same person, whom the ancient Jews had provoked in the wilderness. The very word translated *lord*, which is appropriately attributed to Jesus Christ by the writers of the New Testament, is the same by which the name *Jehovah* is commonly rendered in the Septuagint; so that it seems to be clear, that our Saviour was, before his incarnation, a being represented to us in the ancient scriptures, as possessed of all the attributes of God, and distinguished by the very name, by which God had announced himself to Moses.

There are, it is acknowledged, some few passages of the New Testament, which appear to convey a meaning inconsistent with the divinity of Jesus Christ; they are however without difficulty explicable in such a manner, as to leave unaffected a doctrine already established by so great a combination of testimony. If Jesus Christ † addressed the Father as “ the only true God,” it may be easily understood, that this epithet relates to the self-existent and underived divinity, by which the Father is distinguished from the Son and the Holy Spirit. If the Corinthians ‡ were told by the apostle Paul, that “ there is but one

* Ep. to the Corinth. ch. 10. v. 9. † John, ch. 17. v. 3.

‡ 1. Ep. to the Corinth. ch. 8. v. 4, 5, 6.

God the Father, of whom are all things, and we in him ; and one Lord Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we by him ;” we should remember that the apostle was then contrasting christianity to pagan idolatry, and therefore naturally spoke only of the godhead, as it was original in the Father. If again he thus admonished * the Ephesians, “ there is one body and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling ; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all ;” we should recollect, that his object was, not to detail the mysteries of the christian faith, but to enumerate as many particulars as possible, in which christian communion may be conceived to consist, that he might more effectually † exhort the Ephesians “ to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.” The most remarkable of these passages is ‡ that in which our Saviour said to his disciples “ my Father is greater than I.” This declaration was urged indeed by a clergyman of the church of Rome, in a late conference held at Carlow, as a difficulty incapable of solution from the scriptures, and explicable only by the authority of an infallible church. It appears however

* Ep. to the Ephes. ch. 4. v. 4. 5. 6.

† Ep. to the Ephes. ch. 4, v. 3. ‡ John, ch. 14, v. 28.

that * many of the fathers and ancient writers of the church were of a different opinion, for they considered it as relating only to that priority of the Father, in reference to which our Saviour also † said, “the Son can do nothing of himself,” while in the very same passage he claims the actual exercise of equal power, “what things soever he doeth, these also doeth the Son likewise.” Others again have explained it in reference to that humiliated condition, in descending to which he had *emptied himself* of the glory of his proper nature.

If the divine character of Christ has been sufficiently established, it will be a necessary consequence, that he is a proper object of the supplications of his faithful followers. This question has however been very summarily dismissed by doctor Bruce, who has declared, that he relies implicitly on ‡ the injunction of our Lord himself, “in that day ye shall ask me nothing.” It must indeed be admitted, that, if these words of our Saviour should be simply considered, and literally interpreted, they must be regarded as strictly prohibitory. But it may be shown without much difficulty, that the usual language of the sacred writings, and of our Saviour himself, justifies

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* A long recital of their observations has been given by bishop Pearson in his Exposition, p. 34. † John, ch. 5, v. 19.

‡ John, ch. 16, v. 23.

and demands a very different exposition, representing these words as spoken only with an intention of expressing the very great facility, with which the followers of Jesus Christ might then address their supplications to the Father in his name.

The hebrew* scriptures abound with instances, in which a negative form of expression supplies the want of the comparative degree in the hebrew language ; not excluding the thing denied, but only implying a preference of the thing set in opposition to it. Though the books of the New Testament were composed in a different language, we must expect to find in it the idiom of that which was national to the writers, and to those, whose discourses it records. We accordingly discover in the New, as in the Old Testament, various passages containing forms of expression, which, however the literal construction of the english translation may seem to be negative, cannot reasonably be interpreted except in a comparative sense.

In the epistle to the Hebrews, ch. 8. v. 11, the following passage, descriptive of the superiority of the christian covenant, is quoted from the prophet Jeremiah: “and they shall not teach every man his neighbour, and every man

* Walt. Polyglot. Apparat. 3. Idiotism. 6; Kennicott's two Dissertations, p. 208, 209. Oxford 1747 ; and Jennings's Jewish Antiquities, vol. 1. p. 312, 313. Lond. 1766.

his brother, saying, know the Lord: for all shall know me, from the least to the greatest." It cannot be imagined, that the superiority of the christian covenant was to consist in this, that all mutual instruction was to be suspended; but the words, apparently implying such a suspension, have manifestly been employed only to express more forcibly, how generally the knowledge of the Lord should be diffused. The same idiomatic phraseology has also been employed by our Lord himself, on an occasion different from that at present under consideration. In his conversation with the woman of Samaria, John, ch. 4. v. 21, he said unto her, "woman, believe me, the hour cometh, when ye shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father." The obvious meaning of these words, notwithstanding their literal signification, is merely that the Father should not be, as was then customary, worshiped exclusively in either of these places, a new doctrine being promulgated, which enjoined a spiritual worship, not to be restrained by local limitations.

If then these negative expressions must be interpreted only as forms of language, strongly enforcing the declarations, to which they are contrasted, not as themselves containing direct and specific declarations, why should that expression, in which our Saviour told his disciples, that they should not ask any thing of him,

be otherwise understood? If he should not be understood as intending to prohibit the worship of the Father on mount Gerizim, or at Jerusalem, why should he be supposed to have intended to prohibit his followers from addressing their supplications to himself? There is indeed, even in the same discourse, another expression, which forbids such an interpretation. "I say not," says our Saviour, "that I will pray the Father for you, for the Father himself loveth you—" It will not be urged, that our Saviour intended to impress his followers with a belief, that his intercession should not be exercised in their behalf, for this would have been to abdicate his character of Mediator: and we must conclude, that his intention, in using these words, was merely to impress them deeply with a persuasion of the love entertained for them by his Father, which is indeed assigned by himself in the succeeding verse. This expression however is not directly negative, as the others. He does not say, I will not pray the Father for you, but, "I say not unto you, that I will pray the Father for you." Possibly he may have apprehended, that the former mode of expression might be too literally understood to the denial of his intercession, and therefore, while he still adhered to the negative idiom of those whom he addressed, he qualified the phrase to preclude the danger of misconception. Unless therefore

we must conclude that, under the christian covenant, it had become wholly unnecessary, that one man should instruct another in his duty; that the worship even of the Father had become absolutely unlawful in two particular portions of the surface of the earth; and that the intercession of Jesus Christ with his Father had been, by the love of the Father, rendered superfluous to our spiritual welfare; neither should we conclude, with doctor Bruce, that, while we are encouraged to address the Father in the name of Christ, we are prohibited from offering our supplications also to our Redeemer.

This difficulty having been thus removed out of the way, we may proceed to consider, what direct authority we have for addressing our prayers to Christ, even though he has himself so encouraged us to offer them to the Father in his name. In regard to this enquiry however it should be observed, that it cannot be expected, that such authority should be found in the gospels, which are narratives of the occurrences of our Saviour's ministry, while he appeared on earth in a human character. In his period of humiliation he would not claim to be so addressed, as not befitting the condition, to which he had descended. This was properly reserved for the time, when he had ascended to the glory of his Father; and accordingly the authorities for such a practice must be sought in the conduct and the exhortations of the apostles,

subsequent to his ascension. Here we see a remarkable exemplification of the mischief of the rule, which, for every thing except ecclesiastical regulation, would refer us exclusively to the evangelists. The determination of a question so important, as that on the propriety of addressing prayers to Jesus Christ, must naturally be sought in the other portion of the New Testament.

Supplication addressed to Jesus was indeed the first act of the apostles, assembled after his ascension, for we * are informed, that, in selecting some individual to fill the place of the traitor Judas, they addressed a prayer directly to him, entreating that he would guide the lot which should be drawn. This, as it was the primary act of the apostolic church of christians, might of itself be considered as a sufficient authority for regulating the practice of succeeding ages. It has however been reinforced by other instances, which can leave no doubt in regard to the propriety of such addresses. The original martyr Stephen† died in the act of supplicating Jesus to be merciful to his persecutors: Paul ‡ has declared, that he had thrice besought the Lord, that he might be freed from that cause of humiliation, which he has described as “a thorn in the flesh :” by the || same apostle

* Acts, ch. 1, v. 24. † Acts, ch. 7, v. 60. ‡ 2 Cor. ch. 12. v. 8. || 1 Tim. ch. 2. v. 8.

Christ Jesus is characterised as the “one mediator between God and man;” and we cannot conceive a mediator, without also conceiving a communication by prayer, through which our wants should be made known unto him: the apostle John* expressly describes true believers as offering their petitions to the Son of God, and receiving the things which they had desired of him: and the apocalypset† is concluded with an invocation directly addressed to him; “even so, come, Lord Jesus.”

The intercession of Christ has been admitted by doctor Bruce, and in this important part of the doctrines of our religion his observations appear not to be liable to any objection. On the grand subject of the atonement, made by the death of Christ, he has however published two discourses, which, though chiefly directed against opinions not held by the established church, cannot be dismissed without some unfavourable animadversion. One of these is employed in removing difficulties, the other in stating and maintaining the opinions of the writer.

The first and great difficulty presents itself in the testimonies, which the scriptures have borne to the importance of the death of Christ, which doctor Bruce appears to be desirous of extenuating as much as possible. An enquiry is

* 1 John, ch. 5, v. 14, 15. † Revel. ch. 21, v. 20.

accordingly instituted, whether it was indispensably necessary, so that men could not have been saved, if Christ had not died ; and doctor Bruce comes at length to the conclusion, that, though the mode of Christ's death was an important part of his ministry, it might however have been dispensed with by his Father, without defeating the end of his coming into the world.

The principles, from which doctor Bruce has come to this conclusion, are that our Lord, when the time of his suffering was approaching, prayed to his Father, that the bitter cup might, if possible pass from him ; and that it cannot be conceived either that the Jews were laid under a necessity of perpetrating the atrocious crime ; or that their conversion, which was the immediate object of his mission, and the failure of which he lamented with tears, could have frustrated the redemption of the world.

That our Saviour, when he had taken on him the infirmities of our feeble nature, should have shrunk at the near approach of the most excruciating suffering, appears to require no other solution, than that which is furnished by his voluntary humiliation. That no other inference can be drawn, than that of the reality of his human weakness, appears from the narrative itself. In a moment of less agitation, his suffering being not yet so immediately present to his mind, he sufficiently manifested, though mingled with apprehension, his own conviction of the

importance of his death. "The hour is come," said he,* "that the Son of man should be glorified. Verily, verily, I say unto you, except a corn of wheat fall into the ground, and die, it abideth alone; but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit.—Now is my soul troubled; and what shall I say? Father save me from this hour: but for this cause came I unto this hour." The answer given to his prayer proved, that his death was indispensable. He had earnestly and repeatedly prayed, that the cup of suffering might, *if it were possible*, pass from him. What was the answer? An† angel appeared from heaven, strengthening him to undergo that death, which, it seems, could not be avoided consistently with the plan of human redemption.

Doctor Bruce has indeed inferred from the repeated and earnest prayer of Christ, "that, though his death, at that advanced period, was unavoidable, and there was some great object to be answered by it, yet he did not consider it as indispensable. "This," he adds, "is countenanced by† his expressions in the prayer offered up in the presence of his apostles, at a calmer moment; I have glorified thee on earth: I have *finished* the work, which thou gavest me to do." When however our Saviour said in his prayer,

* John, ch. 17. v. 1. † John, ch. 12, v. 23, 24, 27.

‡ Luke, ch. 22, v. 43.

that he had *finished* the work, which his Father had given him to do, he must be understood to speak only of his ministry. "I," he adds, "have manifested thy name unto the men, which thou gavest me out of the world." This was the work to be done by our Saviour. That which remained, was to be suffered by him, and was to be the work of the Jews; no conclusion whatsoever therefore can be fairly drawn from these words in regard to the importance of his death. He has proved this yet more distinctly, by* saying, just before he expired on the cross, "it is finished." The whole scene of his humiliation was then concluded, all which he had either to do, or to suffer. In the former instance he had only finished that work, which his Father had given him to do.

When it is said, that his death was at that advanced period unavoidable, the meaning must be, that it had become unavoidable, when the gospel had been finally rejected by the jewish nation. This consideration belongs to the other principle, which is now to be examined, whether the death of Christ could have formed a necessary part of the plan of human redemption, if the jewish nation had been converted by his ministry.

It must occasion no small surprise, to perceive that doctor Bruce, who has manifested

* John, ch. 19, v. 30.

so much anxiety to exclude mysteries from his system of opinions, should fearlessly plunge himself into the most profound of all mysteries, a speculation concerning the plan, which the divine wisdom might have adopted for the salvation of men, in a case which has not occurred, and concerning which consequently nothing has been communicated ; and should do this to discover some reason for pronouncing the plan actually proclaimed in a contrary case, not to have been absolutely indispensable. It appears from the sacred writings, that the death of Christ was an event foreseen from the beginning of the world, and that with that event, thus foreseen, was expressly connected the plan of human redemption. But, argues doctor Bruce, unless we suppose that the Jews were necessitated to perpetrate this atrocious crime, they might have been converted, and in this case Christ would not have been put to death. To us it appears sufficient to say that God did foresee, that the Jews would not be converted by the ministry of his Son, and that accordingly Christ was, in the divine purpose, “ the * lamb slain from the foundation of the world.” We are persuaded that the Jews were not necessitated to commit the crime of putting Christ to death : we are not less persuaded, that God did, in his prescience, foreknow from the beginning that the

* Revel. ch. 13, v. 8.

Jews would, as a nation, reject the gospel, and wreak their vengeance on him who should teach them to look to a spiritual Messiah : and we are assured by the most unequivocal declarations of the scriptures, that in this state of things, with which alone we can have any concern, the death of Christ was a necessary condition of that forgiveness, which the Almighty was willing to bestow upon repentant and believing mortals. Should man in such a case turn upon his Maker, and say, nay, but what wouldst thou have done, if the Jews had been converted ?

Doctor Bruce next proceeds to discuss the significations of three terms, the ambiguity of which he conceives to have been productive of a misconception of the christian doctrine. These terms are the words translated *atonement*, *bear*, and *for*, the words *bear* and *for* being applied to the bearing of sin.

With the object of this discussion the established church has no direct connection, for doctor Bruce has assigned, as his reason for entering into it, that “ on some of the senses, in which these words are taken, have been chiefly erected the doctrines of imputed righteousness and vicarious punishment,” which doctrines * have been disclaimed by archbishop

* Discourses on Atonement and Sacrifice, p. 150, 208. Dublin, 1801.

Magee, who has also admitted, that the word translated *atonement*, might even with greater propriety be interpreted *reconciliation*, as doctor Bruce has strenuously contended. It is acknowledged by the archbishop, that the death of Christ was not strictly vicarious, from which it follows that as there was no actual imputation of the sins of men to Jesus Christ, so neither is there any actual imputation of the righteousness of Jesus Christ to men. It is indeed inconceivable, that one being should be regarded as really guilty of the sins committed by another, or as really possessed of the righteousness, which the conduct of another had manifested. But it is conceivable, for it is agreeable to our ordinary experience of the general providence of God, that one being should suffer penal consequences of the guilt of another, or receive advantages from his obedience. This is all which the doctrine of the established church maintains, and which the archbishop has described, in the case of the death of Christ, as of vicarious import, though not strictly and properly vicarious so as to involve that actual transfer of guilt and righteousness, against which doctor Bruce has protested.

In regard to the word *bear* some surprise must be felt, when it is considered, that the

* Discourses on Atonement and Sacrifice, p. 235—246.

argument concerning its scriptural acceptance had already received from the archbishop* an ample discussion, and that it had been shown in particular, that Matthew, where he referred to the prophecy of Isaiah, for the words “ himself took our infirmities and bare our sicknesses,” may most naturally be understood to have spoken, in the last of them, of sicknesses of the mind, as best corresponding to the word *sorrows* in the fourth verse of the fifty-third chapter of the prophet, to which the evangelist has alluded. The examination of this argument might have been expected to have presented itself to the observation of doctor Bruce, as he has in the following sermon quoted the treatise, in which it is contained. It has however so happened, that he has not noticed it, but has again urged the already refuted statement, that the word *bear* must signify merely to *bear away* or *remove*, and cannot be interpreted to mean *the suffering* of those evils, which the offences of others had merited. The truth seems to be, that his attention was so exclusively directed to the extreme opinion of imputed righteousness and vicarious suffering, as held by some members of his own church, that his mind was not sufficiently disengaged for recollecting the reasonable and satisfactory exposition, which the doctrine of the atonement had received

from a writer of the established church, and he was led to conclude, that the rejection of the former would be sufficient for establishing an opinion, which excludes every notion of atonement.

Of the word *for* it is alleged, that the greek words so translated are equivocal, sometimes signifying *instead of*, sometimes *on account of*, or *in favour of*. The argument is not new, for it had been already urged by doctor Priestley in behalf of the unitarian doctrine; nor is it now necessary to enter into an elaborate examination of it, for it has already* been fully discussed by archbishop Magee. The reasoning indeed had been more distinctly stated by the advocate of unitarianism. He had argued that, if the true doctrine be that these things were done *upon our account*, or *for our advantage*, the word *for* will have the same sense in all the texts; but if the true doctrine be that they were done *instead of us*, the sense of this word cannot remain unvaried. But the archbishop has justly remarked, that this argument is utterly inconclusive, the word *for*, or the greek words ἀντὶ, ὑπὲρ, διὰ, περὶ, of which it is the translation, admitting different senses in different applications, though without any change of the doctrine, since these senses, however different, are notwithstanding consistent. Thus it might be perfectly proper to say, that Christ suffered *instead of us*, although it

would be absurd to say, that he suffered *instead of our offences*. Nor would the proposed exposition *on account of*, that is, *for the benefit of*, be free from the same difficulty; for, although dying *for our benefit* is perfectly intelligible, dying *for the benefit of our offences* is not less absurd than dying *instead of our offences*. The only fair inference, the archbishop proceeds to remark, is that the word *for* does not necessarily imply substitution in all the passages, in which it is found, and that therefore it is not sufficient to lay a ground for the doctrine, which implies that substitution: but that, on the other hand, it does not imply it in any, can by no means be contended, for it is admitted that the words ὑπὲρ and ἀντὶ have that meaning frequently in their common application.

Doctor Bruce has also followed doctor Priestley, in representing as figurative, and addressed exclusively to the Jews, various expressions employed by the writers of the New Testament to impress the minds of the early christians with a sense of the importance of the death of Christ; and he has done this, as in the preceding instances, without noticing the observations, with which such a representation had been already refuted in the well-known treatise of the archbishop. It* has been there shown, agreeably to a distinction quoted from Mr. Veysie, that these expressions are not merely figurative allusions,

* Discourses on Atonement and Sacrifice, p. 155—157.

which would indeed afford but little ground for any inference, but analogical descriptions founded on analogies, which had been constituted by God himself for this very purpose. It was not merely because the death of Christ bore some resemblance to the jewish offering of an animal, that it was described to the Jews as a sacrifice, but because the sacrifice of an animal had been instituted by the Almighty, to represent that event to ages, in regard to which it was yet future. To call the death of Christ a sacrifice, was therefore in effect to intimate, that it was the very event, which sacrifices of animals had been appointed to prefigure. An analogy is an argument, not merely an embellishment of language ; and an analogy instituted by the Almighty himself, is an argument invested with the authority of revelation.

The argument too, by which doctor Priestley had endeavoured to prove, that the allusions to the jewish sacrifices were merely ornamental figures of language, is here repeated, as if its inconclusiveness had not been already exhibited. If, says doctor Bruce, the several sacrifices and ceremonial observances all differ among themselves, they cannot literally represent the death of Christ ; and if none of them agree with it, they must be all used in a metaphorical sense. Now, he adds, St. Paul speaks of the death of Christ, sometimes as a sin-offering, and at others as a peace-offering. These were essentially ;

different. Neither of them corresponded with the death of Christ; and his death could not correspond with both. If it was a sin-offering, it was not a peace-offering: if a peace-offering, it was not a sin-offering. It was, therefore, neither; except by way of similitude. If it were, it should have been offered by man; for sacrifices were offered by the person expecting favour. Besides, sin offerings were never vicarious; nor were they prescribed for any offences, except those of ignorance, accident, or ceremonial pollution. Christ also, he alleges, could not be both priest and victim; he could not be a priest by the jewish ritual, not being descended from Aaron; and if he was a victim, he was a human victim, which was an abomination. The paschal lamb, moreover, to which Christ is compared, was, as doctor Bruce alleges, not sacrificed; and the same remark is made in regard to the scape-goat, to which the sacred writers are supposed to allude in reference to this subject.

Concerning some of these observations I would in the first place remark, that archbishop Magee had before shown, that the paschal lamb was actually sacrificed, that the atonement of the jewish sacrifices did extend to violations of the moral law, and that, while the scape-goat was suffered to flee into the wilderness, to express the removal of guilt, a bullock and

another goat were sacrificed, to represent its punishment. To these remarks it may be now added, that the sacerdotal character of Christ has been expressly referred, in the epistle to the Hebrews, not to the jewish priesthood, but to that earlier priesthood of Melchisedec, which was antecedent to the jewish law.

We have here again an instance of the tendency of extreme and opposite opinions to meet in one common error, for the argument used by the advocate of that, which assumes to be a rationalised form of christian doctrine, if traced to its principle, will be found to be precisely the same with that, on which the church of Rome has established the monstrous doctrine of transubstantiation, converting a morsel of bread into the actual body of the saviour of the world. The church of Rome contends, that the expression "this is my body" cannot have any other than a literal signification. The adversaries of the doctrine of the atonement maintain, that a scriptural expression, if not capable of being understood literally, cannot bear any signification important to our faith, and therefore deny that the death of Christ can have any sacrificial character at all. The principle of both is the same, though, according to their different views, it has led the romanists into an idolatrous superstition, and the rationalisers into a rejection

of a fundamental doctrine of their religion. Between the two parties a truly reasonable interpreter of scripture may discover, that words may, besides their direct and literal application, have also an analogical signification, which is important to his faith; and thus that, as the bread, though not literally the body of that being, who then held it in his hand, was yet its analogous representative in its sustaining power, so the death of Christ, though not literally a sacrifice, did yet correspond in its redeeming influence to those ceremonial observances, which had indeed been appointed for the very purpose of directing towards this influence the attention of mankind.

Having explained, as he conceives, the ambiguous terms and metaphorical expressions, which had in his judgment embarrassed the doctrine of our redemption, or rather having endeavoured to show, that these expressions, significant and forcible as they might appear, should yet be regarded as mere embellishments of speech, persuasive perhaps to a Jew, conversant as he was in the ceremonial observances of his country, but unmeaning and idle as addressed to a christian of another nation, doctor Bruce proceeds to enquire into the purport of the doctrine itself. In making this enquiry he undertakes, first, to state what the doctrine does not, and, secondly, what it does import.

To the statement of that which the doctrine of our redemption does not import, a member of the established church has not any thing to object; and doctor Bruce has himself quoted from archbishop Magee a declaration, that "the sacrifice of Christ was never deemed, by any who did not wish to calumniate the doctrine of the atonement, to have *made* God placable; but * merely viewed as the means, through which to bestow forgiveness, chosen by divine wisdom." If, as he has alleged, many, who profess to be zealous members of the established church, represent the Deity as an inexorable judge, who, rather than not have satisfaction, will inflict the penalty on the innocent instead of the guilty; and as a harsh and merciless creditor, expecting payment to the uttermost farthing from the security, when he cannot, or does not choose to have it from his debtor; the reply must be, that such men, if there are such, *do not know what spirit they are of*, and that the church does.

* This temperate mode of holding the doctrine appears to have been first proposed by Mr. Ludlam, a celebrated mathematician, in his animadversions on a dialogue written on this subject by Mr. Hervey, in which he had speculated much concerning the manner, in which God is induced to forgive men for the sake of the sufferings of Christ. Mr. Ludlam was followed by Dr. Powel, Dr. Balguy, and Dr. Ogden. "I am mistaken," says Dr. Hey, "if this does not, in a little time, prove the settled opinion of improved and enlightened christians." Hey's Lect. in Divinity, vol. 3. p. 295. Cambr. 1796.

not acknowledge them as maintaining in their purity her genuine doctrines. That the death of Christ was properly a punishment, that his suffering was strictly vicarious, is explicitly denied by the archbishop, who is acknowledged to have maintained the true doctrine of the church. All for which he contends is, that the death of Christ has been expressly pronounced, in numerous passages of the scriptures, to be the means, by which the salvation of men is effected, and that this direct connection with our salvation is represented in terms indicating a correspondence to the sacrificial ordinances of preceding ages. In what manner the death of Christ was directly instrumental to human salvation he pretends not to know. The reality of the connection has been revealed to us ; its nature has however been withheld from our knowledge ; and it is our duty, and our wisdom, to accept the grace of the Almighty, as he has offered it, without presuming to attempt to penetrate into his counsels.

The objections urged by doctor Bruce against that which he has named the popular doctrine of the atonement, might be left without further reply, for they have in truth been all considered and refuted in the very treatise, from which he has himself quoted a brief statement of the true doctrine. But there is one position, which cannot be dismissed without

some special observation. He has represented as a part of this popular doctrine, that “sinners are exempted from punishment, relieved from guilt, and rewarded with high privileges and blessings, *without faith, repentance, or reformation.*” The calvinist does indeed teach, that the salvation of men is arbitrary, *irrespective*, and unconditional; and so he may be fairly charged with holding, that faith, repentance, and reformation, are not conditions of salvation, however he may maintain that, by the influence of the grace of God, they always follow election. But this is not the doctrine of the established church, with which it is apparently confounded by doctor Bruce. Our seventeenth article speaks of those whom God “hath chosen in Christ out of mankind,” but these are not described as chosen *irrespectively*, or without condition. The doctrinal part of the article is expressed, as nearly as possible, in the very language of the scriptures, and no interpretation is introduced, which could in any degree authorise such a statement. “If thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments,” said our Saviour, and our church *

* Bishop Mant’s Bampton Lectures, p. 59, 60. Lond. 1816. Whatever difference of opinion may exist in regard to the interpretation of the particular passage of the scripture, the passage quoted by the bishop from the Homilies (2d part of the sermon of Good Works, p. 41. Oxford edit) is decisive in regard to the doctrine of the established church.

represents Christ as declaring in these words, "that the laws of God be the very way, that doth lead to everlasting life," and accordingly pronounces, "that this is to be taken for a most true lesson, taught by Christ's own mouth, that the works of the moral commandments of God, be the very true works of faith, which lead to the blessed life to come." That there is no ambiguity in these expressions, but that the observance of the moral commandments of God is stated to be a condition of salvation, is manifest even from the contrary interpretation of the same passage of the scripture, which Calvin perceived to be required by his own doctrine. By him the passage is interpreted, as if Christ had said, if thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments; but thou canst not keep the commandments, therefore thou canst do no good thing, that thou mayest have eternal life.

By the unitarian the death of Christ is regarded as having only given, like the death of any other teacher of religion, a solemn attestation of the truth of the doctrine which he taught. By those who hold that Jesus Christ was more than a prophet, and that his death was instrumental to the salvation of men, three different opinions have been entertained concerning the nature of its instrumentality. One extreme of these three opinions is that the crimes of men were imputed to Jesus Christ, who, though really innocent, was regarded by

the Father as guilty, and his suffering accepted in the place of the punishment of the real offenders. This is the doctrine, which, though unjustly attributed to the established church, has justly provoked the animadversions of doctor Bruce. The other extreme opinion is that of doctor Bruce himself, and probably of all those, who are denominated arians; this maintains that the salvation of men is effected, not directly by the death, but by the intercession of Christ; and that his death is concerned only as a part of that obedience, for which he was rewarded with the power of procuring the pardon of offenders. The intermediate doctrine, which is that of the established church, is that repentant sinners are saved, not merely by the intercession of Jesus Christ, but directly by the efficacy of his death, which the Father had constituted the means of human salvation, though without imputing guilt to him, who *knew no sin*, or accepting his suffering simply as a commutation of punishment for the satisfaction of offended justice. What is the nature of that direct connection of the death of Christ with the salvation of men, the church does not pronounce, because it has not been revealed, but we deem the doctrine itself to have been explicitly declared in numerous passages of the sacred writings, and therefore to be one, which we are bound to receive with the humblest reverence. It is for a sincere and

pious reader of the Bible to consider, whether he is at liberty to understand as merely figurative, all the passages so strongly describing Christ as an offering for the sins of the world, and to frame a system of redemption through the intercession of Christ, in which his death should be regarded as but indirectly instrumental, and of secondary, and even contingent importance.

If there be at this day, and in these countries, as doctor Bruce has alleged, a multitude of enthusiasts, whose fanaticism prompts them to delight in the prevalence of vice, as more plainly illustrating the instantaneous operation of the Holy Spirit in conversion, the author of this treatise, and the church of which he is a member, would join with doctor Bruce in the utmost severity of his condemnation of a persuasion so unchristian and so pernicious. That there are enthusiasts, who delight in the actual prevalence of vice, the author has not known; though he has been satisfactorily assured, that enthusiastic preachers have expatiated with complacency on the vicious practices of their own lives, which had preceded their conversion, and that one in particular had declared from his pulpit, that a life of sin was the best preparation for the divine acceptance. Those indeed are horrors, which every reasonable christian must reprobate and reject; but he should at the same time take care, not to suf-

fer his abhorrence of a pernicious enthusiasm to hurry him into a rejection of the essential doctrines of his religion. The anabaptists of Germany were deservedly odious to every man of a moral and religious mind : what protestant however will hold, that Luther, in his indignation at their vicious extravagancies, should have abandoned the Reformation ?

Whoever has contemplated the general state of society in these countries during the last thirty years, must have witnessed a change most gratifying to every serious mind, whatever errors may have resulted from the ill-regulated, or even from the ill-directed zeal of individuals. In the place of an indifference, which excluded from the intercourses of society as unseasonable every consideration of a religious nature, religion has become a subject of general concern, and the best means of attaining its objects are the most familiar topics of ordinary discourse. France, which, by a corrupt philosophy, had perverted the minds of many in our higher and fashionable classes, arrested her own mischief by the naked exposure of infidelity in the horrors of her revolution ; and the treatise of Mr. Wilberforce on practical christianity gave an impulse to the religious, similar to that which the alarm of Mr. Burke gave to the political world. These causes have gradually operated a prodigious improvement, which should not be disparaged, or disregarded, for the extravagancies of zealots.

The public mind is awakened to a due sense of its most important concerns, and should be instructed, not discouraged. The excesses of enthusiasts should not be urged as a justification for the cold and unscriptural doctrine of arianism.

Doctor Bruce has concluded his statement of his views of christian doctrine with a sermon, in which he has proposed his opinion concerning the future state of the wicked. As in this sermon he has hazarded an opinion on a subject most awfully interesting, with a very slight consideration indeed of the declarations contained in the sacred writings, it may deserve attention as a specimen of the effects of a disposition to speculate with a hasty confidence in the interpretation of scripture.

In meditating on the tremendous question of the divine vengeance, doctor Bruce first rejects, as unauthorised, two opinions, by which men have endeavoured to mitigate its terrors, some supposing that future punishment shall be only purgatorial, and therefore limited to a definite period of time, and others that the minatory expressions of the sacred writings were employed only to signify the extinction of being. These opinions he declares to appear to him untenable hypotheses, grounded only on the wishes of benevolent people, and a pious anxiety for the honour of God. But, even while he declares that he can never encourage sentimental

speculations on divine subjects, and professes to seek his satisfaction in a fair interpretation of the written revelation, he has himself * adopted a modification of the doctrine of future punishment, which in its most important part depends on a mere supposition.

The opinion advocated by doctor Bruce is that the wicked, when they shall have been punished during a long period of time, shall then cease to exist. To support this opinion he truly alleges, that in the sacred writings terms expressive of eternal duration are used with much latitude, often, perhaps most frequently, implying only the term of the existence of the person, or thing, which is at the time the subject of consideration. "Now," he proceeds, "if, upon due and dispassionate consideration, we can understand the strong expressions of our Lord relative to future punishments, as limited to the existence of the sufferers, and *suppose* that this period may be prolonged or abridged, according to the justice or mercy of God, we shall find ourselves relieved from many of the difficulties attending this perplexing and *affecting* subject." Thus, while he professes to condemn sentimental speculation on divine subjects, he has himself endeavoured to relieve his mind

* This opinion is not new : two persons have been mentioned by Doddridge, as having maintained the same notion. Lectures on Pneumatology, Ethics, and Divinity, vol. 2. p. 474. Lond. 1794.

from the horrors of future punishment, by supposing, without any authority whatsoever from the scriptures, that the period of punishment shall be limited by the annihilation of the sinner, and that this annihilation shall be retarded, or accelerated, so as to proportion his punishment to his guilt.

That* future punishment should be only purgatorial, so that at length all the damned, the fallen angels included, should be so reformed by the discipline of their punishment, that they should be received into everlasting happiness, was first taught by Origen, who was fond of interpreting christian doctrine agreeably to the tenets of the platonic philosophy. This notion was in the last century revived by Hartley, who adopted it as suitable to a system of philosophical necessity, since a being not free could not be a subject of punishment in any proper acceptation of the word. We have here a curious instance of the concurrence of unrestrained speculation with the device of an interested superstition, in adopting the scheme of a purgatory, to which the scripture affords no authority.

The doctrine of the annihilation of the wicked was† first proposed by Socinus, but so covertly, that it could only be collected by

* Doddridge's Lect. vol. 2. p. 478, 479.

† Pearson on the Creed, p. 393.

inference from his writings. His suggestion was received with much disapprobation even by some of his own followers ; but has since been adopted by some persons, who chose to trust to their own reasonings in qualifying their interpretation of the scriptures. It is indeed most natural that those, who exclude from their creed the hope of christian redemption, should endeavour to persuade themselves, that they may escape from the terrors of the divine vengeance by the immediate extinction of their being. As doctor Bruce, though he has rejected the doctrine of an atonement effected specifically by the death of Christ, has yet acknowledged his intercession, he is not driven at once to this extremity, but is willing to admit a limited, though a varying period of punishment, after which the sinner shall find his refuge in annihilation.

The purgatorial scheme has indeed been preferred for the unitarians of England by their great philosopher Priestley, who had been educated in all the severity of calvinism, and appears still to have retained so much of the opinions inculcated in his youth, as he could convert into a system of philosophical necessity. As a being acting through necessity cannot be esteemed accountable, Priestley taught that the future sufferings of the wicked should be not punishment, but discipline, having for their object the amendment of the offenders, and

terminating in rendering them objects of the divine acceptance. This scheme indeed excludes the unscriptural tenet of the annihilation of the wicked, to whom it even on the contrary opens a distant prospect of admission to the favour of God; but the process of reasoning, by which this conclusion is attained, is little gratifying, for it consists in reducing man to the rank of a machine, not subject to punishment, because not capable of moral action. Thus was Priestley, while he rejected all influence of the Holy Spirit, contented to admit that the human mind is passively actuated by every other; and while he anxiously narrowed his creed of revealed truths, he adopted into his philosophical religion the purgatory of a crafty superstition.

Though at the Reformation the main question in dispute with the roman catholics was that concerning the merit of human performances, which was utterly denied by the protestants, yet there were * even then some persons, who, in separating from the church of Rome, denied the divinity of Jesus Christ. Encouraged by the freedom enjoyed under the constitution of Poland, these sectaries † sought and obtained a retreat in that country, where in the year 1565 they were required to constitute a distinct society, that the contentions existing between them and the calvinists might be permitted to sub-

* Mosheim, vol. 4. p. 486, 487. Lond. 1782. † Ibid. p. 499, 500.

side. Hitherto they were chiefly arians; but* the unitarians became about that time the predominant party, when the elder Socinus had visited Poland. The sect of the socinians, which had been thus formed, established itself firmly in Poland† and Transylvania; and in the latter of these countries still publicly professes its doctrines, but ‡ in the year 1658 it was banished from Poland through the influence of the roman catholics, provoked at an insult offered by some students to a crucifix.

Driven from Poland the socinians§ sought asylums in the protestant countries of Europe, and among others in England, where|| they had before the end of the preceding century made some attempts with little success to establish their opinions, but ** in the year 1640, when a number of canons were published for the protection of the established church, one was directed against socinianism. But though these antitrinitarian doctrines had thus an early existence in England, and the socinians of Poland, both before and after they were expelled from their own country, gave their assistance in propagating them, they made in this country a very slow and inconsiderable progress, until they were at length aided by the tendency, manifested among the presbyterians, to depart

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* Mosheim, vol. 4. p. 509. † Ibid. p. 513, 514. ‡ Ibid. vol. 5. p. 500, 501. § Ibid. p. 503. || Ibid. vol. 4. p. 515, 516.

** Neal's Hist of the Puritans, vol. 2 p. 331. Bath 1793.

from the original tenets of their church. This tendency appears to have operated in the earlier part of the eighteenth century. When, in the beginning of the reign of William a law was enacted for rewarding with a legal toleration the good conduct of the presbyterians in effecting the revolution, it was not judged necessary to extend that advantage to any who should not subscribe to the doctrinal articles of the established church; but in the year 1773 the great body of the dissenting ministers* of England preferred a petition to parliament, supplicating to be released from a subscription, which was no longer consistent with their sentiments.

It was not unnatural that, when the zeal of calvinistical protestants was no longer sustained by opposition, they should themselves recoil from the gloomy and terrible doctrine of the arbitrary decrees of God. Since Calvin, who seems to have been strongly actuated by the spirit of a leader of a sect, could yet† acknowledge that the doctrine which he taught, was a horrible decree, it may well be supposed that, in a later period, when the zeal of his followers had been gradually moderated by time and tran-

* Thirteen ministers only dissented from the plan of preferring a petition, and only fifty signed a counter-petition. The whole number of ministers was reckoned at that time to be about 2000. Horsley's Tracts, p. 435—439.

† Decretum quidem *horribile* fateor.—Inst. lib. 3. cap. 23, sect. 7.

quillity, this doctrine should give offence to the reason of reflecting men, and dispose them to indulge themselves without any restraint in qualifying the articles of their faith, that they might form for themselves what they would denominate a rational religion.

Nor was the peculiar doctrine of Calvin free from a direct tendency to generate this corruption of the genuine principles of the christian faith. When human salvation was referred to the arbitrary and *irrespective* decrees of God, the second person of the trinity was easily conceived to be degraded from the rank of a primary agent in the work of redemption to that of a mere instrument in the execution of a preordained arrangement. Those who embraced this doctrine were accordingly disposed by it to attach less importance to the agency of the Son of God ; and the transition was natural from a degraded opinion of his agency to a degraded estimate of his nature and character.

This account of the tendency of the calvinistic doctrine is not a mere speculation, but is strongly confirmed by the facts of history. It is known that this tendency was perceived even in the time of Calvin, who * was accordingly charged with maintaining opinions derogatory

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* Calvin was obliged to plead his cause at Berne against a charge of arianism. Mackenzie's *Life of Calvin*, p. 43. Lond. 1809. His opinions were attacked by Lutheran writers, as of

to the dignity of the Son of God. Its actual operation was manifest at Geneva itself about the middle of the eighteenth century, D'Alembert * having declared, that in his time perfect socinianism was the religion of the greater number of the pastors. In Great Britain it was also conspicuous about the same time. A secession was in Scotland made from the national church in the year 1736, on the alleged principle, that the church had † itself declined from its original doctrine, contained in the confession of Westminster, and that it had become necessary to separate from it in recurring to its genuine tenets. Among the English presbyterians the trinitarian doctrine was so generally abandoned in the year 1773, that only fifty out of two thousand ministers expressed an anxiety, that the existing restriction in regard to the trinitarian doctrine should be retained. Among the presbyterians of Ireland the socinian doctrine has found little favour, as we have been informed

a unitarian tendency. Albertus Grawerus de novo ac horrendo errore circa doctrinam de satisfactione Christi pro peccatis humani generis, p. 8, 9. Jenæ 1621. and Locorum Theologicorum Johannis Gherhardi, tom. 3. p. 290.

* D'Alembert's *Miscell. Pieces*, p. 71. Lond. 1764.

† It is stated in the history of Methodism, under the year 1751, that "one great design in sending preachers thither, is to make a stand against the overflowing of arianism and socinianism in that kingdom." Miles's *Chron. Hist. of the People called Methodists*, p. 57. Methodism, it is however remarked, had not prospered much in that country. The history ends with the year 1799.

by doctor Bruce himself, who * has stated, that not more than one or two ministers and about a dozen of the laity are of this persuasion. The arian doctrine has however been more successful, having been early in the eighteenth century introduced from Scotland into the presbytery of Antrim, in which it has continued to be professed. Doctor Bruce has ‡ recently asserted, that this doctrine has long prevailed in the synod of Munster, and is making an extensive, though silent progress, through that of the northern province. The statement of doctor Bruce is indeed probably correct in regard to the southern synod, but in respect to that of Ulster it must be ascribed to the partiality, with which all men are disposed to regard their own opinions ; the synod of Ulster is said to have contradicted it by a formal resolution, and had already given a practical refutation, by electing for the academical institution of Belfast a professor of divinity acknowledged to hold opinions strictly trinitarian.

As doctor Bruce has manifested an anxiety to separate his doctrine from that of the unitarians, it may be useful to state in how many important particulars they agree, that it may be more distinctly seen, what that system of religious opinions is, which he has proposed to substitute, not merely for the calvinistical tenets

* See a Letter written by doctor Bruce in the year 1813, as quoted by archbishop Magee, *Disc. and Illustr. etc.* vol. 2. part 2, p. 338, 339.

‡ Epistle Dedicatory, prefixed to his Sermons.

of a portion of his presbyterian brethren, but also for the moderate articles of the established church.

Doctor Bruce has in his system admitted the preexistence and the intercession of Jesus Christ, acknowledging him to be a being far superior to man, to have existed in glory with God before the creation of the world, and to have been rewarded for his obedience with the office of interceding with him in behalf of men, and with the power of bestowing salvation on them according to his pleasure : but he has denied that this being is divine, and that our prayers should be addressed to him ; and the Holy Spirit he has pronounced to belong to a yet inferior class of existence. In these opinions concerning Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit he differs indeed from the unitarians, for these hold that the former was a mere man, and deny the distinct personality of the latter. In regard to our nature however he agrees with them, for he denies that it has experienced any degeneracy, and, with the doctrine of our corruption, he rejects also, like them, that of an atonement effected directly by the death of Christ, regarding this event only as a part of the obedience, for which he was constituted the lord of the christian church. He also agrees with them in attributing no present influences to the Holy Spirit. Though he has admitted, that this being was employed in forwarding the

work of salvation after the departure of Christ, yet this agency seems to have been in his opinion limited to the period, in which extraordinary powers were exercised for the early propagation of the knowledge of christianity, since he has not, in any of these sermons, spoken of any salutary influence, which christians might now expect to receive from the Holy Spirit for the support and invigoration of their piety. In regard to the deeply interesting question of future punishment, he differs from the followers of Priestley, in preferring temporary punishment to purgatorial discipline, one arbitrary supposition to another.

If we more briefly compare this arian scheme of religion with that of the unitarians, we perceive that the former possesses only these advantages, that it gives us an intercessor indeed, but without any proper atonement, and acknowledges the existence of the Holy Spirit, while it rejects the belief of his sanctifying influences; that while the unitarians agree with the church of Rome in maintaining the doctrine of a purgatory, the arians combine with a long period of actual suffering the infidel's hope of annihilation; and that both agree in regarding man as still naturally capable of observing the commandments of God, and securing his own acceptance.

The distinctions of the two systems seem to admit an easy solution, if they be considered as

departing to different distances from the same common original of calvinistic christianity. The arian and the unitarian, alike offended at the tenet of arbitrary and *irrespective* decrees, go together into the contrary extreme of the sufficiency of man, and consequently concur in rejecting the belief, both of the atonement effected by the death of Jesus Christ, and of the influences of the Holy Spirit in assisting the feebleness of the moral power of our nature. The arian however, rejecting only the atonement of Jesus Christ, and retaining the belief of his intercession, preserves still some imperfect scheme of human redemption; but the unitarian, abandoning wholly the hope which is in Jesus, is driven to seek a succedaneum in the doctrine of philosophical necessity, reducing man to the class of a moral machine, and converting the future punishment denounced against the wicked into purgatorial discipline. The succedaneum is indeed analogous to the original doctrine, for it only substitutes a necessity of moral mechanism in the place of a necessity created by a divine decree, whereas a doctrine of intercession supposes the existence of human liberty, without which there can be no responsibility, and consequently no proper punishment. The purgatorial discipline of the unitarian was a consequence of the doctrine of philosophical necessity, since there could be no guilt meriting punishment, where there was no freedom

of action. The notion of the final extinction of the wicked after a long period of suffering, may have been adopted in some undefined feeling of the imperfection of a system, which promised no divine assistance, and provided no specific atonement.

The system of the unitarian has, it must be confessed, the merit of superior consistency and completeness. It is obvious however that, while it avoids an acknowledgment of inward influences communicated by the Holy Spirit to the minds of men, these have been conceived to be so entirely subjected to the outward action of motives and circumstances, that they are deprived of all self-direction. Strange, that the unitarian, in asserting the sufficiency of human reason, should be driven to degrade his nature to mere mechanism, and in narrowing his admission of revealed doctrine should adopt the purgatory of superstition !

If we now consider more particularly what is that form of christianity, which has been advocated by doctor Bruce, we find in heaven two created beings, as the agents of our redemption, one of them, the Holy Spirit, inferior to the other, and employed but for a temporary occasion, which is now long past : on the earth we are taught, contrary to all experience, and indeed to the acknowledgment of doctor Bruce himself, to regard man as naturally adequate to the discharge of his duties ; we are not encou-

raged to believe, that any spiritual assistance shall be vouchsafed to him, as indeed it cannot be necessary, if his moral strength be unimpaired, and sufficient for his support ; and we are directed to regard the death of Jesus Christ, as an event but indirectly and contingently connected with our salvation, being instrumental to it only as a part of the obedience of Christ, and not at all essential to the general plan of our redemption. With the existence and functions of the Holy Spirit we have now, according to this doctrine, no concern ; and, being sufficient of ourselves for our moral direction, we should look to Jesus Christ only for his intercession on account of those offences, which it is acknowledged that all, notwithstanding their natural sufficiency, do occasionally commit. If however any persons, conscious of the manifold and deep-seated infirmity of their nature, should doubt, whether such a doctrine presents a satisfactory view of their future prospects, some consolation is provided in the conjecture, that, when the more grievously wicked shall have been sufficiently punished, the mercy of God may perhaps be interposed for their annihilation.

Though doctor Bruce has represented that his doctrine is making an extensive progress among his presbyterian brethren of Ulster, there is good reason for believing, that a reaction is at this time operating, which disposes

them rather to recur to the original tenets of their church. The presbyterians in truth participate in that general increase of attention to religious concerns, which happily characterises the present period, and under its influence, those who have adhered to the ancient confession of faith, cannot be inclined to embrace a more lax system of doctrines, and many of those who have departed from it may be believed to feel some distrust of the soundness of their present opinions. But when it is considered, that their church has manifested by its past changes the prevailing tendency of its primitive doctrines to degenerate into those very systems of arianism and unitarianism, from which it seems to be now tending to recover itself, it may well be questioned, whether any permanent advantage could be gained to the cause of religion by the reestablishment of its ancient principles. The same causes would, it might be expected, produce again the same effects. The severity of calvinistic opinions would again alienate those of their number, who should dare to reason on their religion, and many such must be found in a body so composed ; arianism and unitarianism would again be embraced, as excluding mysteries generally from religion, but especially the great mystery of a doctrine of redemption founded on the assumed corruption of our nature ; and thus the opinions of the

presbyterian church would of necessity vibrate between the two extremes of religious opinion, according as the rigour of calvinism should tend to generate among them rationalising forms of christianity, or the reaction of the religious feeling of the public should send them back to their original profession.

The grand doctrines of our religion are those of the corruption of our nature, of the atonement made for sinners by the death of Jesus Christ, and of the sanctification bestowed upon them by the influences of the Holy Spirit for rendering them fit objects of salvation. The first indeed is the basis of the two others, for whoever is thoroughly persuaded that his nature is corrupt, will be disposed to embrace with gratitude the forgiveness offered in the doctrine of the atonement, and will earnestly look for that sanctifying influence, which may support him in the future performance of his duties. He, on the contrary, who begins with persuading himself, that his moral powers are naturally adequate to the discharge of every duty, which God requires of him; will see no reason for attaching importance to the other doctrines: a simple intercession, with some vague and undefined notion of redemption, he may indeed think requisite for procuring the pardon of the occasional offences of men, or even without an intercession he may suppose that a sufficient reliance may be placed on the divine mercy ;

but the doctrine of sanctification, to be effected by the influences of the Holy Spirit, he will wholly discard, as not necessary to the undiminished rectitude of his nature, and inconsistent with its dignity.

Two different classes of protestant sectaries, who admit the first of these doctrines, are but too apt to attach to one of the others an importance so paramount, that the remaining one is neglected, though not formally renounced; and the consideration of this their common error may be useful, in showing how effectually religious opinions would be moderated, if men were sufficiently careful to maintain the whole doctrine of the gospel, and would not suffer their attention to be engrossed by one favourite principle.

Though Wesley, the founder of the methodists, in the beginning of his course gave much attention to the doctrine of justification, or of the atonement of Christ, and even in the latter part of it shrunk from the use of* the

* "Mr. Wesley taught that a believer might, though he need not, fall from grace: he never used the term *sinless* perfection; but he exhorted believers to love God with all their heart, which he termed *christian perfection*." Chron. Hist. of Methodists, p. 59. "I ask, says Mr. Wesley (at a conference held in the year 1770) once for all, shall we defend this *perfection*, or give it up? You all agree to defend it, meaning thereby, as we did from the beginning, salvation from all sin, by the love of God and our neighbour filling the heart." Ibid. p. 100. The progressive change is marked in the same narrative. "Do we preach as we

words *sinless perfection*, as descriptive of a state of moral improvement attainable by man in his present existence, yet he gradually inclined more and more to that of sanctification, as implying the actual attainment of practical holiness, and * even professed to regard the atonement of Christ, as at length necessary only for procuring pardon of erroneous opinion occasioning erroneous practice, the true believer becoming in process of time incapable of committing any more grievous offences. The followers of Wesley† have been even less cautious than their leader, and have confidently proclaimed, that they were assured of having

did at first? Have we not changed our doctrines? A. 1. At first we preached almost wholly to unbelievers. To those therefore we spake almost continually of remission of sins through the death of Christ, and the nature of faith in his blood. And so we do still, among those who need to be taught the first elements of the gospel of Christ. 2. But those, in whom the foundation is already laid, we exhort to go on to perfection: which we did not see so clearly at first, although we occasionally spoke of it from the beginning.—Ibid. p. 31. The change occurred particularly in the year 1760. “In this year a great revival of religion took place among the Methodists. Many persons, men and women, professed to be cleansed from all unrighteousness, and made perfect in love in a moment, often while hearing the word, but more frequently while at prayer, or while others were praying for them. Mr. Wesley thus speaks of it. Here began that glorious work of sanctification.”---p. 64.

* Wesley's Sermon on Salvation by Faith, quoted by Dr. Hales in *Methodism Inspected*, part 2. p. 50, 51, 60--62. *Dubl.* 1805.

† Grimshaw's Letter to Wesley, *Ibid.* p. 49.

received that sanctifying influence, which bestowed upon them entire holiness.

The pretension of christian perfection, advanced by Wesley and his followers, may be cited as one among numerous instances of the tendency of extreme opinions to meet at the same point. The sect appears to have received its existence from a religious reaction, excited by a philosophising tendency among the clergy of the established church, which had caused the peculiar doctrines of our religion to fall into neglect ; and much good has certainly been effected by it in recalling the attention of the established clergy to those doctrines, and causing them to cease to be mere moralists in their exhortations, and, as bishop Horsley emphatically, though coarsely, said, “the apes of Epicurus.” But while the methodists thus happily brought back the established clergy to doctrinal exhortation, they have themselves embraced a doctrine practically coincident with that very notion of human merit, which was the main subject of controversy in our separation from the church of Rome. The church of Rome held that all men might perform acts meritorious in the sight of God, and that persons of extraordinary piety might even attain to a merit of superogation, or exceeding that which was necessary for procuring their own salvation, and consequently allowing a surplus to the disposal of

the church for effecting the salvation of others, who were not so well provided. The methodists have not indeed proceeded so far, as to suppose that any man could do more than was required ; but they have taught that men might in this life attain to a perfection, at least excluding all voluntary and wilful sin, and consequently needing little, if at all, the atonement which Christ had made for the sins of the world. The vain notion of human merit was thus in effect, though not in name, introduced again by those, who had found the established church not sufficiently spiritual, and in the excess of a reforming spirit men were brought round almost to the point, from which the Reformation had originally departed.

A secession was early made from Wesley and his followers by Whitfield, who embraced in all its rigour the doctrine of Calvin, and became the founder of the sect of calvinistic methodists. Among these indeed we find no tendency towards the notion of human merit disguised under a doctrine of christian perfection, for this doctrine was, on the contrary, condemned by them as monstrous. These methodists, referring the whole work of human salvation to the arbitrary determination of the Father, could not feel the same necessity of striving for the attainment of holiness, because according to their view salvation did not in any respect depend upon themselves. Jesus

Christ they acknowledged as the agent of that redemption, which the good pleasure of God designed for those, whom he had arbitrarily chosen ; but to the Holy Spirit no part of their system of religion directed their attention, since whatever holiness they should possess would be communicated to them in virtue of that same decree, by which they had been selected for everlasting happiness. It is not intended by these observations to insinuate, that calvinistic methodists are antinomians, or professedly regardless of moral righteousness ; but only that their doctrine draws them away from the doctrine of sanctification through the influences of the Holy Spirit, by fixing their attention on the decree of God. This tendency is indeed sufficiently manifested by the extreme tenet of antinomianism, which is * the corruption of the calvinistic doctrine, and even by the phrase, so familiar with the sect, that they should not *patch* with their own the righteousness of God.

It has been shown that the original methodists, in their partial preference of the doctrine

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* How strong is the disposition to this corruption is attested by the most unquestionable evidence, that of the late Rev. Thomas Scott, who has declared his certain knowledge, that religion, by which he must be understood to mean religion agreeable to his own conception of it, was in many places wofully verging to anti-nomianism. See his Life, ch. 8. Lond. 1822.

of sanctification tended towards the romish doctrine of human merit. It may now be remarked that the calvinistic methodists obeyed the same law of the convergence of extreme opinions, in tending, by their partiality for the doctrine of justification, towards another principle of the same church, which disburdens the individual of much of the care of his own salvation. The roman catholic relies with confidence on the care and the performances of his priest; the calvinist on that decree of God, of which he persuades himself that he is a favoured object : they agree in trusting mainly to an agency distinct from their own anxious endeavours to fulfil the divine commands.

The one sect of methodists were thus, by their calvinistic doctrines of election, as much alienated from the doctrine of the sanctifying influences of the Spirit, as the others were, by their doctrine of perfection, diverted from depending on the atonement of Jesus Christ. Each sect attached itself to one of the two doctrines of justification and sanctification, neglecting the other ; and each was hurried into an extravagance by the want of the controlling influence of that doctrine, which was neglected. If the follower of Wesley had duly felt the necessity of that salvation, which was procured by the death of Christ, he would not have indulged himself in visions of christian

perfection. If the disciple of Whitfield had sufficiently considered the necessity of personal holiness, he would have scrupled to embrace the doctrine of an arbitrary election, which tends to separate the atonement of Christ from the moral conduct of christians. The doctrine of the established church, retaining all the tenets, which have been represented as peculiarly characterising the christian faith, is guarded against all the errors, into which sectarians have been seduced by their neglect of some one of the three principles. Maintaining the principle of the corruption of our nature, it is secured against the self-sufficiency of the arians and the socinians, which degrades the character of Jesus Christ, and rejects the operation of the Holy Spirit. Maintaining, with the divine dignity of Christ, the indispensable and universal importance of the redemption, which has been effected by the humiliation and suffering of such a being, it is also secured against the enthusiasm, which has filled Wesley and his followers with the vain notion of religious perfection. Maintaining the necessity of personal holiness as an indispensable condition, and not merely a consequence of election, it is equally secured against the error of the calvinistic methodists, which refers the whole work of salvation to a decree of God, not depending on any condition of obedience, and therefore not directing men

to seek the assistance of the Holy Spirit. This threefold doctrine is consistent with the experience, the reason, and the moral feeling of mankind. It is consistent with human experience in excluding, on the one part, the notion of the unimpaired purity of our nature, and on the other, that of its religious perfectibility ; and with our reason and moral feeling in excluding the notion of arbitrary decrees, which represents God as the author of sin, and distributes everlasting happiness and misery without any reference to innocence or guilt. It provides relief for the sinfulness of man by the atonement of Christ, and it vindicates the holiness of God by affording to man the sanctification of the Spirit. The ardour of a sectarian disposition finds in it no gratification, because it flatters neither the pride of philosophy, nor the enthusiasm of religion. All is equable and harmonious, and its influence is orderly and tranquil, producing its beneficial effects without agitation and without disturbance, like the great movements of material nature, which are imperceptible to our senses, but discover themselves to our reason in all the varied glories of the universe.

OBSERVATIONS

ON THE

ATHANASIAN CREED.

THE creed commonly distinguished by the name of Athanasius, appears to demand a separate consideration. The historian of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire has spoken of it with scorn, as a monument of human folly : doctor Bruce has proceeded so far as to say, that it is a curious string of palpable contradictions : protestant dissenters frequently allege it as constituting a grand impediment to their union with the established church : and many members even of our own church regard it with alienation, as a form of doctrine not consonant to their feelings, and embarrassing to their religious profession. This is not a state, in which a solemn declaration of the faith of a church should be suffered to remain. It ought to be seen, whether this creed may be satisfactorily vindicated from the sneers of the infidel ; it ought to be tried, whether a fair statement would recommend it

to the acceptance of our protestant brethren ; and, above all, the members of the established church itself should be enabled to judge, whether the declarations, in which they are required to concur, are indeed uncharitable and contradictory, or a temperate and even guarded exposition of the doctrines of revelation.

Bishop Horseley, in his controversy with doctor Priestley, has * said, “ I believe, Sir, that few have thought so much upon these subjects, as you and I have done, who have not at first wavered.” Sheltered by so high an authority, the author of this treatise may not be afraid to avow, that his opinion concerning the character and importance of the athanasian creed † has wavered, and that in the earlier part of his life he thought, with archbishop Tillotson, that it might be wished that the church were well rid of it. In the progress of life he has learned to regard it with different sentiments, because he has learned to give some of its most remarkable expressions a different construction ; but he conceives that he has been, by that original alienation, enabled to form his present judgment on the subject, as it served to disengage him from the subtleties, by which his opinion of the creed had been embarrassed.

By Luther this creed has † been happily

* Bishop Horseley's Tracts, p. 315. † Luther de Trib. Symbolis, Oper. tom. 7. p. 138.

described as the bulwark of the apostle's creed. The latter appeared to this reformer to comprehend all that was necessary for the belief of a christian, but to require the protection of the former, when it was assailed by the misconstruction of heresy. Calvin, though his opinions concerning the Persons of the Trinity were sufficiently orthodox, appears to * have condemned the use of the word itself, as unscriptural and unauthorised ; nor does his famous Institution of the Christian Religion contain a reference to any of the three established confessions of faith. His dislike of the term was plainly consistent with his peculiar notion of arbitrary decrees, which referred the whole plan of human redemption to the unconditional determination of the Father, and consequently left for the other divine Persons only an instrumental agency. Cherishing a doctrine, which so eminently exalted the supremacy of the Father, he must have looked with alienation on a term, which combined the three Persons in one common godhead. Luther, on the other hand, contending with the church of Rome mainly on the question of human merit, was not influenced by any prepossession, which could affect his conception of the divine nature, and therefore saw

* See the passages quoted in Sandii Nucl. Histor. Eccles. p. 425. Colonix 1676.

in the creed, by which the doctrine of the divine nature was most particularly detailed, only the protection which it afforded to a more general exposition of his faith.

The historian of the roman empire * has indulged some feeling of triumph in remarking, what had been long known to every scholar, and is indeed admitted in the rubric of our liturgy, that the creed denominated from Athanasius was not really his work. This is however of no importance, since the merit of a creed, not claiming the authority of revelation, must be determined, not by any consideration of its author, but by comparing its tenets with the doctrines of revealed truth. It is acknowledged also that the creed designated by the name of the apostles, was not really composed by them, but was gradually framed in† a long period of years, and merits its appellation only as it is conceived to express the doctrine taught by the apostles. The athanasian creed may in the like manner be understood to have received its appellation, as containing a system of doctrine considered as corresponding to the opinions maintained by Athanasius in his great contest with Arius. We have indeed historical evidence, to prove

* Decline and Fall etc. vol. 3. p. 464. Dubl. 1789.

† This creed, according to Vossius, was not completely settled before the year 400. *De Tribus Symbolis*, p. 29. Amst. 1642.

that the name was actually acquired in this manner, without any intention of imposing the creed on christians as the work of Athanasius. In * almost all the ancient copies, and especially in those of greater antiquity, it is entitled *Fides Catholica*, or *Fides Athanasii*, in not one *Symbolum Athanasii*, as it should have been denominated, if the intention had been, that it should be received as truly the creed of that distinguished bishop.

Some of the † ancient commentators indeed seem very early to have fallen into the error, that this creed was truly the work of Athanasius, and perhaps by this very error were led to take the trouble of composing their comments. The most antient now extant, that of Venantius Fortunatus, which is referred to the year 570, entitles the creed *Fides Catholica*; but Hincmar's, which is referred to the year 852, and was therefore nearly three centuries later, denominates it *Symbolum Athanasii*. After Hincmar we have two commentators, one referred to the year 1033, the other to the year 1110; of whom the former has adopted the appellation *Fides Catholica Sancti Athanasii Episcopi*, the latter simply *Fides Catholica*. In the year 1120 Peter Abelard denominated the creed *Symbolum Athanasii*, which appellation was from that time conti-

* Waterland's Crit. Hist. of the Athanasian Creed, p. 121—123. Cambr. 1728.

† Ibid. p. 88, 89.

nued, except that in the year 1215 it was again designated by its original title.

The * first modern, who critically enquired into the origin of the creed, was Vossius, who in the year 1642 ascertained that it was not the work of Athanasius, and that it had not been composed in the greek, but in the latin language. The opinions of the learned however concerning its true author remained unsettled, nor did that opinion, which ascribed it to Vigilius, bishop of Tapsus in Africa, and has chiefly prevailed, attract attention until the year 1675, when it was maintained by Paschasius Quesnel. Doctor Waterland † has since, with much greater probability, traced it to Hilary bishop of Arles in France, and has concluded that it was composed about the year 430.

Whether we believe that this creed was the work of Vigilius, or of Hilary, it was in either case a production of the fifth century, as those who ascribe it to the african bishop, refer it to the year 484. This was a time, which, though not to be ranked with the apostolic age for ecclesiastical authority, was yet in western Europe antecedent to the grosser abuses of our religion, and its doctrines were there maintained in considerable purity. “The ‡ man of sin” had not yet been “revealed,” for that

* Waterland, p. 24, 25. † Ibid. ch. 7. ‡ 2. Epist. to the Thess. ch. 2. v. 3 etc.

which *letted*, namely the roman power, had not yet been “taken out of the way.” The empire of Rome was indeed suppressed in the * year 476, when the city was taken by Odoacer, the chief of a confederate band of barbarians ; but the government of this prince, and the gothic kingdom, which succeeded seventeen years afterwards, constituted only a † sequel of the roman dominion, and Machiavel has dated the commencement of the papal greatness from the rise of the power of the Lombards, or the year 569, when the division of Italy between that people and the Greeks first afforded an opportunity for the management of a balanced policy. A creed, which may be traced back to

* Or in the year 479, as Gibbon seems disposed to conclude. Decline and Fall etc. vol. 3. p. 498, note.

† Odoacer did not even assume the title or ornaments of royalty, but proposed to administer the government in the name of the eastern emperor, then acknowledged also in the west. Theodoric, the founder of the gothic kingdom of Italy, had in early youth been delivered by his father as a hostage to the eastern emperor, had remained at his court thirteen years, and was then encouraged, or permitted, to lead his countrymen into Italy, as the ally of the empire. By both the polity and usages of Rome were as much as possible preserved, a king of a different nation of the Goths having previously discovered, during their temporary possession of Italy, that his countrymen were too little civilised to be capable of constituting a gothic polity. But the most important circumstance was, that the government both of Odoacer and of the gothic kings comprehended the whole of Italy, and therefore left no room for the policy of the popes. Lect. on the Philosophy of Modern Hist. vol. 1. p. 279--285. Dubl. 1816.

an antiquity so respectable, is at least entitled to a serious consideration.

In another view also the antiquity of this creed is of great importance, for it authorises us to lay aside the metaphysical subtlety of the intervening ages, and to form our opinion of it simply from an examination of its own expressions. The period of scholastic refinement was long subsequent to the fifth century, Johannes Scotus Erigena, the true founder of the scholastic theology, having lived in the ninth, and the system having been completed by Abeillard so late as the twelfth. However therefore the speculations of the schoolmen may have been exercised in discussing the articles of this creed, we may consider them as irrelevant to its true interpretation. The athanasian creed shall therefore be here examined independently of any scholastic notion of the doctrine of the trinity.

It may be remarked that the latin original of the creed affords a strong presumption in favour of its simplicity, for the passion of disputation was characteristic of the Greeks and orientals, not of the people of the more western countries, and a creed framed among the latter, in an early period, must have been composed, not in a spirit of vain refinement, but because some crisis had occurred, which appeared to demand an exposition of the doctrine of the church. The passion of disputation, which was

indigenous among the orientals and Greeks, was indeed at length introduced among the Latins in the formation of the scholastic theology; but the only theological discussion, which had in the fifth century arisen in the west, was that maintained between Augustin and Pelagius, concerning the moral sufficiency of man and the divine decrees, and with this the athanasian creed had no concern, though it belonged to the same age, to which the creed has been referred. Greece and the east were the native soils of theological dissension, which, in passing to the western countries of Europe, would naturally lose much of its asperity, and would less disqualify the minds of men for forming a temperate determination. Even the predestinarian doctrine of Augustin has been with probability traced to a mitigated influence of his manichean philosophy, which belonged to the east. The pelagian doctrine of the sufficiency of man, which was of a western origin, was perhaps the result rather of a decay of the influence of christianity, than of speculative refinement.

Whether the athanasian creed be believed to have been composed by Vigilius in Africa, or, as is much more probable, by Hilary in France, a crisis demanding such an exposition of the faith may be easily discovered even in the elementary constitution of the political system of the west, though more plainly, if it be

ascribed to Hilary. The mutual opposition of the arians and the athanasians was a primary principle in the political arrangements of modern Europe, and the promulgation of this very creed appears to have been the stand, which the latter made against the inroads of the former, and thus to have served to maintain the orthodox party for that connection, which was subsequently formed between France and Rome by Clovis, and was afterwards perfected by Pepin and Charlemagne.

The controversy of arianism, which chiefly gave occasion to the creed, arose from the disputatious refinement of oriental metaphysicians, and the question had accordingly been decided by a general council, held at Nice in Bithynia in the year 325. From the east the doctrine of Arius appears to have been propagated into the west, not by the educated and disputatious, but by the rude nations of the north, which had received it from Constantinople, where * it had prevailed long enough to spread itself among the neighbouring tribes of barbarians.

The last day of the year 406 was the epoch of the irruptions made by the barbarous nations

* Arius was protected by Constantine, and his doctrine was embraced by Constantius, the son and successor of the first christian emperor. Arianism was soon afterwards again encouraged by the emperor Valens. *Lect. on the Phil. of Mod. Hist.* vol. 1. p. 379. note (1).

of Germany into Gaul. This first invasion was effected by a mixed multitude of the Suevi, the Vandals, the Alani, and the Burgundians, of whom all except the Burgundians passed forward into Spain. In the year 412 the Goths, who had unsuccessfully attempted the conquest of Italy, abandoned that country for Gaul, and settled themselves in the southern provinces; and in the year following the main body of the Burgundians crossed the Rhine, to join their countrymen in the eastern district. A kingdom was established in the year 419 by the Goths in their part of Gaul, Toulouse being constituted the seat of their government. The Vandals passed from Spain into Africa in the year 429, invited by the imperial governor of the roman province, who had been through an intrigue of the court driven by his fears into rebellion. All these tribes were of the arian faith.

It appears from this detail, that the southern and eastern provinces of France had been occupied by arian nations about seventeen years, and that a kingdom had been established in the former by one of them about eleven years, before that in which Hilary is supposed to have published in these provinces his protest against their heresy in the athanasian creed. It was natural that an eminent bishop of the roman church, when he found himself surrounded by rude tribes, professing a form of religion, which he must have deemed heretical, should raise his

voice against the perversion of religious truth, and by a strong exposition of that which he cherished as the genuine faith, endeavour to support the cause of his church against the barbarians. If Vigilius be supposed, with many writers, to have composed the creed in Africa in the year 484, it would have followed the arrival of the arian Vandals at an interval of fifty years. This supposition is however so much less probable than the former, that it is scarcely worthy of consideration. The remarkable correspondence indeed of the historical circumstances, which appear to have been connected with the former, adds considerably to the probability of the opinion, which ascribes it to Hilary, and regards it as originally published in France.

Fortunately * for the interests both of policy and of religion, the providence of God sent one of the northern nations into Gaul, not previously converted to christianity, and therefore not tinctured by the arian doctrine of the east. The Franks, being proselyted by the clergy of Gaul after their invasion, received from them the tenets of the general church, and thus formed on a basis of orthodoxy the foundation of the ecclesiastical system of the country from them named France, the parent-government of modern Europe, and began,

under their prince Clovis that connection with the see of Rome, which, as it was afterwards perfected by Pepin and by Charlemagne, became the primordial combination of the european system. As however the invasion of the Franks did not occur until the year 486, it seems to have been necessary, that some vigorous exertion should previously have been made for the support of orthodoxy in the southern provinces, where it might otherwise have perished in the long interval of seventy-three years, intervening between the last arrival of the arian tribes and that of the pagan Franks. The interposition of Hilary seems then to have preserved the faith of the church for the arrival of its future allies the Franks, and thus to have made preparation for all the future arrangements of Europe, both ecclesiastical and civil. To the immediate aggrandisement of that nation it appears to have been instrumental, by maintaining in the southern provinces an auxiliary strength, which afterwards enabled the frankish princes to reduce under their own authority the entire territory.

The creed, which appears to have been framed in such circumstances, has been censured as speculating with a metaphysical curiosity of refinement on the nature of the divine being ; but no accusation can be less warranted. If the circumstances of its origin have been truly represented, whichsoever indeed

of the two opinions concerning it should be adopted, such an accusation would suppose that a man of eminent talents had been foolish enough to prepare a metaphysical creed for encountering the errors of ignorant barbarians, who were arians only because they knew no other form of the christian faith. But the creed itself refutes the imputation. It is not metaphysical, for it makes no attempt to reconcile its tenets by any theory of the divine nature. It should rather be denominated dogmatical, in that theological sense of the word, by which it signifies an authoritative statement of doctrine. So far indeed is it from endeavouring to reconcile its doctrines, that it has been on that very account represented as a mass of contradictions. Its tenets, whether true or false, are simply and nakedly propounded ; and for the exclusion of contrary heresies, to which it was at once opposed, they are even industriously contrasted. This direct contrast of the expressions, by which contrary heresies are excluded, produces an unpleasant effect by its abruptness ; but it does not follow, that the assertions so contrasted must be contradictory, for truth itself, when opposed to contrary errors, must necessarily present itself in contrary aspects. From these observations a judgment may now be formed of the unfairness of the sarcasm of Gibbon, who has *

* Decline and Fall etc. vol. 3. p. 464.

described this as "the famous creed, which so clearly expounds the mysteries of the trinity and incarnation." The athanasian creed states doctrines, but does not expound mysteries.

But the grand objection urged against the athanasian creed, is that it has annexed denunciations of everlasting misery, as enforcements to the admission of a human exposition of the doctrines of our faith. Religious persons under this persuasion, not less than those of a contrary character, feel a strong repugnance to declarations of so much severity; and even those who adhere to all the tenets of the creed, are solicitous to explain away the rigour of the damnatory clauses. Bishop Tomline has * even gone so far as to declare, that he could not but conceive them to be both unnecessary and presumptuous; a concession of which doctor Bruce has taken care to avail himself in his animadversions.

Two different methods have been hitherto adopted for palliating the severity of the damnatory clauses; one of these was to restrain their application in regard to individuals dissenting from the creed, the other to moderate it in regard to the articles of the creed itself.

Both these methods were first adopted by commissioners appointed in the year 1689 to arrange a plan of comprehension for dissenters,

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* Elements of Christian Theology, vol. 2. p. 222.

when * to the rubric relating to the athanasian creed it was proposed to add these words, “ and the condemning clauses are to be understood as relating only to those, who obstinately deny the substance of the christian faith.” By the addition of these words the operation of the damnatory clauses would have been restrained as to persons, as it would have been limited to those, who should “ obstinately deny,” and as to the creed itself, as it would have been limited to “ the substance of the christian faith.” From the failure of this arrangement, those who wished to qualify the rigour of the damnatory clauses, have generally confined themselves to the former of the two methods, proposing what are named *modest expositions*, in which every palliating consideration is allowed its full influence for excepting individuals from their operation. Of this mode of qualification perhaps the best example may be found in a sermon of bishop Seed.

Mr. Simeon of Cambridge † has, on the other hand, recurred to the other method, first by suggesting that all those parts of the creed, which follow the general exposition of the christian faith, may be considered as intended only for explanation of the general assertion ; and then by more confidently arguing, that they were not even intended as an explanation, but were

* Waterland, Postscript to the Pref.
leticæ, vol. 2. p. 212, 213.

† Horæ Homi-

in truth only a proof of that doctrine, and therefore not properly a part of the creed at all. This proof, he contends, begins with the words, "for there is one Person of the Father ;" and the inference from that proof with the words, "so that in all things as is aforesaid."

The opinion of * archdeacon Dodwell is different from all these, so far as he has proposed to moderate the sense of the words "perish everlastingly," which he has interpreted to mean merely "the being for ever excluded from the only stated claim of promised mercy." In other respects † he would connect the damnatory sentences only with the general doctrine of a trinity in unity.

Let these qualifications avail as far as they may. To the author of this treatise it appears, that a much more simple and more satisfactory account of the matter may be given, by showing that the creed, however paradoxical the assertion may at first be deemed, does not in reality contain any damnatory clause whatsoever, as connected with any human exposition of the faith of a christian. We have indeed the authority of ‡ an evangelist for maintaining, that our Saviour himself has declared, that whoever doth not believe the doctrine preached by the apostles, shall be damned. The rigour of the

* The Athan. Creed vindicated and explained in Three Charges, p. 6. Lond. 1819. † Ibid. p. 29, 30. ‡ Mark, ch. 16. v. 16.

general declaration we may trust that a merciful God will temper, by making all fit allowances for the peculiar circumstances of individual offenders,^a but the declaration itself we are bound to receive with reverence, as uttered by our Redeemer in the last solemn charge, which he addressed to his apostles, when he was returning to that glory, from which he had descended for our deliverance. The question now to be considered, is whether the athanasian creed has really done more, than to recognise this solemn declaration.

The athanasian creed has stated, that “without doubt he shall perish everlastingly,” not who does not hold all its own articles, but who does not hold “the catholic faith.” Now what is to be understood by the catholic faith? To this question an answer is furnished by the earliest comment on the creed which is extant, composed by Venantius Fortunatus about the year 570. This commentator * has explained the catholic faith to be that right faith, which the church ought to hold. The catholic faith is therefore to be understood to signify in the creed the christian faith; and the creed, in stating that, except a man believe faithfully the catholic faith, he cannot be saved, has stated no more than our Saviour had already declared to

* *Catholica universalis dicitur, id est recta, quam ecclesia universalis tenere debet.* Waterland, p. 297, 298.

his apostles. The language of the creed itself indeed establishes the same interpretation, for in another part of it "the christian verity" is mentioned as equivalent to "the catholic religion," agreeably to that parallelism of expression, on which bishop Lowth has commented in regard to the Old Testament, and which bishop Jebb * has discovered also in the New.

The creed in truth contains two distinct propositions, which have inadvertently been confounded into one; that the belief of the catholic, or christian faith, is necessary to salvation; and that the exposition of the creed does justly represent that catholic or true faith. The distinctness of these two propositions is manifest in the introductory clauses of the creed. The first and second contain a solemn statement of the declaration of our Saviour concerning the necessity of a true, or catholic faith. In the third the creed proceeds to explain the particulars of this faith: "and the catholic faith is this ---." Whether the alarming denunciation contained in the first and second, should be understood to be connected with the subsequent exposition, is left to be inferred, and the validity of the inference must depend on the correctness of the exposition, the conclusion to be drawn for himself by each person, by whom the creed is recited.

* Sacred Literature, Lond. 1820.

The same damnatory declaration is repeated in the conclusion of the creed; and, though the construction of the sentence is not equally distinct, the grammatical relation of its members is best explained by a similar interpretation. The concluding clause is, "this is the catholic faith, which except a man believe faithfully, he cannot be saved." In this sentence what word may most fitly be considered as the grammatical antecedent of the relative "which"? If the word "this" be the antecedent, then indeed the damnatory declaration is attached immediately to the exposition of faith contained in the creed: but the grammatical construction of the sentence is more simple and direct, if the word "which" be referred to "the catholic faith," the term immediately preceding; nor indeed can the word "this" be made the antecedent without an emphatical pronounciation, which should distinguish it from the ordinary and natural construction of the sentence. Thus the direct and obvious meaning of the former passage, in which, as it is the preface of the creed, the principles are most distinctly stated, is also most agreeable to the grammatical construction of the concluding passage, in which, as it is merely a repetition, the same care has not been employed to propound with distinctness the two propositions.

An expression is indeed found in an intermediate sentence, which appears to correspond

to those already mentioned, and yet does not admit a similar explanation: "he therefore that will be saved, must thus think of the trinity." The words "must thus think" plainly show, that the particulars of the creed are here considered. But of this sentence it may be observed, that it contains no words directly damnatory, for it does not state, that whosoever does not thus think, shall be damned, but merely urges strongly the necessity of entertaining this belief. This consideration, which presents itself on the face of the english translation, is rendered decisive by a more correct interpretation of the word "*sentiāt*" in the original creed, which should be translated *let him think*. The sentence therefore contains only a solemn admonition, without presuming to annex peremptorily and directly the dreadful denunciation of everlasting perdition, as the sanction of any merely human exposition of articles of faith. This intermediate sentence, it is admitted, relates expressly to the articles of the creed, and may thus have given occasion to the important error, that the damnatory clauses (this, it has been shown, is not damnatory) are also to be in the like manner understood of the creed itself. A distinction ought therefore to be carefully made between it and the damnatory clauses. This, which relates to the particulars of the creed, contains no damnatory declaration concerning

unbelievers, but merely an exhortation to belief, which, according to a more correct translation is a simple counsel. The other passages, which do contain damnatory clauses, should, as has been shown, be resolved each into two distinct propositions, of which one is merely declaratory of the denunciation of our Saviour concerning the importance of the christian faith in general, and the other, without annexing any denunciation, states merely the opinion of the persons reciting the creed, concerning the particulars of which that faith should be understood to be composed. The manifest moderation of that passage, which does relate to the particulars of the creed, affords a confirmation to the interpretation, which in the other passages separates from those particulars the damnatory declarations.

Thus of the three clauses, which have been examined, the last receives its interpretation chiefly from the first, in which the two propositions, one relating to the catholic faith in general, the other limited to the particular exposition of it proposed in the creed, are clearly distinguished, while the intermediate passage relates simply to the details of the creed, and should be separately considered, its true interpretation being assisted by a consideration of the creed in its original language. This peculiar reference of the intermediate clause at the same time accounts for the mo-

deration, with which it was composed. When the enforcement of the importance of the catholic faith is to be expressed, no language can be too strong, because in that case our Saviour himself has pronounced the sentence of condemnation against unbelievers; but when the object is to claim attention to the details of a human exposition, which may be erroneous, a simple, though a serious admonition is all which can be admitted.

The commissioners, who prepared the proposed rubric in the year 1689, appear not to have observed the distinction between the reference of the intermediate clause, and that of the beginning and the conclusion of the creed, and therefore, conceiving that the dam-natory declarations in the beginning and the conclusion did, like the intermediate clause, relate to the articles of the creed, to have seen no other expedient for mitigating their severity, than that of declaring arbitrarily, that they should not be considered as relating to all its details, and that they should be applied only to obstinate unbelievers. But it does not appear on what principle a just notion may be formed of "the substance of the christian faith," distinct from the doctrines detailed in the creed; and if the denunciations are limited to doctrines, which are really comprised in the substance of the christian faith, neither does it appear on what principle the commissioners

could undertake to qualify declarations, which in this case would be the same with that made by our Saviour.

The plan of mitigation suggested by Mr. Simeon seems also to be liable to question, inasmuch as it does not appear, why the clauses explanatory of the general principle, or the proofs alleged for its support, should be deemed less important to the faith of a christian, than the general principle which the former explain, or the latter prove. But even if this distinction should be admitted, the general principle, which maintains that "the catholic faith is this, that we worship one God in Trinity, and Trinity in Unity, neither confounding the Persons, nor dividing the Substance," is itself a human exposition of faith; and to connect damnatory declarations with it, is, though perhaps in a less degree, exposed to the same objection, as if they were connected with all the particulars of the creed.

The just and true view of the subject seems to be, that the creed is after all, not damnatory, but simply declaratory; that it contains indeed damnatory clauses, but that these do not relate to the exposition of faith proposed in the creed, and are only declaratory of the denunciation already pronounced by our Saviour. If it be asked, why then were they introduced, the answer is to impress on the minds of rude and

ignorant barbarians, who had been instructed only in arianism, the indispensable necessity of endeavouring to attain to a right conception of the faith of christians, and thus to procure a more solemn attention for that particular exposition, which was then offered to their acceptance. We may leave to our Redeemer the care of mitigating according to circumstances the application of his own declaration.

In thus interpreting the athanasian creed the ordinary rule has been observed, by which, in the construction of a human statute, we consult the preamble for discovering the intention of the enactment, for we have found in the clauses, with which the creed begins, the two distinct propositions, the distinctness of which authorises the inference, that the damnatory declarations have no connection whatsoever with its details. Another rule of interpretation is, that a statute should be so explained, as that every part of it may have its appropriate operation ; and accordingly a separate bearing has been assigned to the intermediate clause, in correspondence to its more tempered language, which without this distinction would have no propriety. If ecclesiastical authority be required for the interpretation here proposed, we have it in that declaration, by which we are directed to interpret the articles of our church, and consequently its creeds, in their literal and grammatical meaning.

The three creeds, recognised in the articles of the established church, have all differed in the circumstances of their respective originals. The creed named from the apostles was gradually framed out of the early traditions of the church, being not completely settled before the end of the fourth century : the nicene creed was a form of doctrine * prescribed by the first general council of the church, assembled for the purpose of determining, how the faith should be expressed, when the arian controversy had proved, that the simpler statements of an earlier creed were not sufficiently distinct for excluding an erroneous doctrine : the creed denominated from Athanasius was neither transmitted by a primitive tradition of the church, nor prescribed by the authority of any general council, but, prepared by a single bishop for the instruction of his own diocese, it grew out of the necessity of his situation, and was gradually received as the creed of the western church on account of its acknowledged orthodoxy.

The earliest of these creeds, having been chiefly composed in primitive times, when heretical opinions had not yet been developed, at least within the western church, contained no clauses protesting against heresies, but a simple

* Vossius was of opinion, that this creed was probably the same with a more ancient oriental creed, except so far as it was opposed to arianism. *De Tribus Symbolis*, p. 31.

enunciation of the facts and doctrines, which a christian is required to believe. Jesus Christ is accordingly stated to be the only Son of the Almighty Father, and our Lord, without any more specific designation of his divine nature; and he is said to have been conceived of the Holy Ghost, and born of the Virgin Mary, without any distinct exposition of his incarnation. The primitive traditions were sufficient for the creed of a church not yet distracted by heretical opinions. When however the arian doctrine concerning Jesus Christ had begun to prevail, as men began to introduce their own speculations into the consideration of religious truth, it was judged necessary to prepare by the authority of the church a confession more full concerning his divine nature; and accordingly a creed was framed at the council of Nice, which represented him as “ of the same substance with the Father,” and thus “ God of,” or rather from “ God,” and “ Light of,” or from “ Light,” and “ Very God of,” or from “ Very God.” Even this statement was in a short time found to be insufficient, for the arians objected to the orthodox, that they, in such a statement of their belief, must either hold that there are three Gods, if they regarded the three Persons of the Trinity as distinct beings, or maintain the faith of the unitarians, if they regarded them only as different characters of one and the same being. It then became fur-

ther necessary to prepare a confession, which should disclaim both these extreme opinions, and maintain a trinity in unity ; and as Apollinaris had at the same time taught, that Jesus Christ was not truly man, but to his divine nature had assumed only a human body, or the outward character of that of man, to this declaration of the doctrine of the divine nature of our Redeemer was added a more explicit statement of his incarnation.

The declaration of Peter, that Jesus was “ the Christ, the son of the living God,” which drew forth the strongest testimonial of the approbation of our Saviour, would doubtless have been sufficient to express the faith of any christian, so far as the character of our Lord is concerned, if it were uttered in singleness of heart, as we must believe it to have been uttered by the apostle ; nor could it in such a case have required, in respect of the divine nature, any other addition, than that of a belief in the existence and the influence of the Holy Spirit, which were subsequently made known. These particulars accordingly constitute the whole of the doctrinal part of the primitive creed of the christian church in relation to this high and mysterious subject. When however advantage was taken of the ambiguity of language, and new meanings were affixed to the terms of this creed, it became necessary to meet these interpretations successively with new

statements, professing indeed to declare, though with greater distinctness, only the original doctrines. The later of these other statements of the faith has accordingly been most appropriately denominated by the german reformer "the bulwark of the apostles' creed," as protecting its tenets against the assaults of heresy.

Gibbon * has quoted with approbation the sarcastic remarks of Bayle on a passage of Tertullian, in which this writer had observed, that every christian artisan possesses, and can communicate, information concerning God, which Thales had been unable to furnish to the enquiries of Cræsus. But the observation of Tertullian is just, however he may have failed in illustrating its truth. Whoever believes that a revelation has been communicated by God to his creatures, may easily admit, that the most illiterate of those, to whom that revelation has been made known, must possess more information concerning the relations connecting the Deity with his creatures, than the most penetrating genius, not assisted by revelation, could attain. But this is very different from the ability of explaining the metaphysical nature of the Divinity, which was the subject embarrassing Thales and Simonides. On this subject revelation is silent, for its object was to

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* Decline and Fall etc. vol. 2. p. 203.

instruct men in their duties and their hopes, not to enable them to discuss the nature of their God. To the latter enquiry the faculties of man, even though aided by revelation, are probably incompetent. It is certain that language must be incapable of conveying an idea of the nature of a spiritual being essentially different from ourselves. Our ideas of spiritual beings are formed merely by reflecting on the qualities of our own imperfect spirits ; and the language, even of a divine revelation, can convey to us no other ideas, than those with which its words have been already connected in the previous usage of men. Even of our own substantial nature indeed we are ignorant ; for who can explain the essence of the spirit that is within him, though he can reflect upon its operations ? Nor can the operations of limited and imperfect spirits furnish any distinct analogies, by which we may be assisted to the comprehension of the qualities of “ the high and lofty one, that inhabiteth eternity.”

As the prevalence of heresy rendered greater precision necessary in stating the faith of a christian, it became convenient to introduce the term *trinity*, which is certainly not found in the sacred writings. This term, or rather the term *τριάς* corresponding to it in the greek language, was first adopted into theology from the general language of the Greeks, towards the close of the second century, by Theophilus

bishop of Antioch. The editor of Mosheim's history, inheriting the dislike of Calvin, has remarked, in the chronological tables affixed to the history, that "the christian church is very little obliged to him for his invention." Since however it merely designates with brevity the three persons, named together by our Saviour himself in the appointed form of christian baptism, it does not appear to be liable to any reasonable objection. Concerning the nature of that Trinity many different opinions have been formed, to all of which the term is alike applicable, and in regard to which therefore it cannot have any other operation, than that of enabling those, who speak or write on the subject, to avoid an inconvenient circumlocution.

The term *substance*, which for the same reason has been introduced into both the nicene and the athanasian creed, has indeed given occasion to much metaphysical discussion ; but for this consequence these creeds should not be esteemed responsible, if it should appear, that in them the term is used simply* for exclud-

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* Athanasius has informed us, that the crafty evasions of the arians obliged the council of Nice to use this term. For if the orthodox assert Christ to be *of God*, the arians would allow it, saying that all things are of God. If they said, the Son is the *power, wisdom, and image* of the Father, the others would admit it, for that we also are said to be the image and glory of God ; and even the meanest creatures are sometimes called the power of God. If they affirmed him to be *God*, the others would allow it, but in no other sense, than as angels and holy

ing the opinion of Arius, and is not rendered the basis of any metaphysical speculation. It is indeed manifest that the term is simply enunciated, for the purpose of expressing distinctly the doctrine of the creeds; and the context of the athanasian creed even indicates, that it is there used merely as equivalent to the terms *godhead*, *glory*, and *majesty*, these being subjoined as explanatory of that *substance*, which the catholic faith forbids us to divide. To that clause which states, that the catholic faith neither confounds the Persons, nor divides the substance of the Trinity, one immediately succeeds confirming the distinctness of the Persons, and this again is followed by another, asserting, for the confirmation of the unity of the substance, that “the godhead of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, is all one, the glory equal, the majesty

men are sometimes in scripture called Gods. If they insisted on it that he is *the true God*, to this also the arians would assent, but reserving to themselves this evasion, that, if he was made *God*, he must be a *true God*. Randolph’s Vind. of the Doctr. of the Trinity, p. 126, 127. Oxford 1754.

Gibbon has ridiculed the contest excited by the difference of a single diphthong between the homoousians and the homoi-ousians. Decl. and Fall etc. vol. 2. p. 214. But that distinction, minute in itself, was important to the determination of no less a question, than that of the acknowledgment of the divinity of Jesus Christ, for the arians, who held that he is a created being, would have embraced the latter, while they rejected the former appellation.

coeternal.” It therefore plainly appears that, according to the context, by the substance, which must not be divided, is signified the divine nature, without any metaphysical and useless effort to explain, wherein that divine nature consists. The term is again employed in stating the union of the divine and the human nature in our Redeemer, as opposed to the doctrine of Apollinaris, who denied that Christ had perfectly assumed the latter, and it is here again manifestly employed as equivalent to the word *nature*.

That the athanasian creed is not metaphysical, but, in the proper and theological sense of the term, dogmatical, may be plainly evinced from a consideration of the manner, in which it pronounces on the doctrine of the Trinity. No attempt whatsoever is made to explain the unity of the divine Persons, as was done in succeeding ages. It is not even alleged, that these Persons are three in one sense, and one in another, to obviate the charge of contradiction. The purpose of the writer appears to have been merely to protest against heresies. In the vain attempt to furnish some conception of the mystery of the Trinity, terms have been introduced by metaphysicians, which are however wholly inconsistent with the simplicity of the athanasian creed. We read not in it of the *προβολή*, or *prolatio*, by which theologians have endeavoured to explain the generation of the

Son; and without sacrificing a single expression of it, we may abandon * to the derision of Gibbon the περιχώρησις, or *circumincessio*, by which an attempt was made to bring the divine unity within our comprehension. The athanasian doctrine of a trinity in unity is rested solely on the authority of revealed truth. Even when "the catholic religion" is mentioned, the expression is introduced, as has been already observed, only in parallelism to "the christian verity," for the creed, it may be added, was anciently denominated the Hymn or Psalm of Athanasius, it is still directed to *be sung* or said, and is still distinguished in our liturgy by the pauses of choral chanting.

If it be demanded, how can propositions, apparently so opposite as the trinity of the divine Persons and the unity of God, be shown to be not contradictory, and mutually destructive, the answer is made by showing, that the subject of consideration, the divine nature, is one to the contemplation of which the mind of man is inadequate, and that we are therefore incapable of pronouncing, that any such contradiction really exists. The question is not simply whether three and one are the same number, but whether in the unity of the same godhead three distinct agencies, or

* "The περιχώρησις, or *circumincessio*, is perhaps the deepest and darkest corner of the whole theological abyss." Decl. and Fall etc. vol. 2. p. 210.

personalities, can exist. The fallacy, in conceiving that the doctrine of agencies so coexistent must involve a contradiction, consists in not reflecting, that we can conceive only finite personalities, like our own, limited in such a manner, that each exists externally in regard to every other. Three finite beings certainly cannot be one, except either by a generic community of nature, or by the consent of their wills, because they exist in a state of outward separation. But what inference can reasonably be drawn from such a case to that of a being, to whom the distinctions of space are wholly inapplicable? If the divine being occupies space, he occupies all space, because he is omnipresent; and therefore no argument against the unity can be deduced from a case, in which finite beings are considered as existing in different portions of space.

In truth all the vain subtleties, which have obscured this doctrine, not less than the fallacies, by which it has been opposed, have arisen from the error of arguing about the divine nature, as if it were a finite object. To attach any meaning to the term *προβολή*, or *prolatio*, which properly signifies *a projection in space*, as it is applied to the generation of the Son, we must conceive the Father and the Son to be each limited in space, for otherwise one could not be projected from the other; and neither can the term *περιχώρησις* be with any propriety

applied to other than finite beings, for such alone are capable of *returning by a circuit*, which is the true signification of the word.

Whitby on the other hand, who in his latter days deviated from orthodoxy into arianism, has * deduced contradictions from the doctrine of the trinity in unity, which may be usefully stated as examples of the fallacy attending every effort to reason on a subject placed so far beyond human comprehension. "Hence it must follow," says this writer, "that the same *numerical* essence must be self-existent and not self-existent, communicated and yet incommunicable (as a self-existent essence must necessarily be), generated and ungenerated, derived and underrived ; it being certain that the Father's essence is self-existing, uncommunicated, and underrived ; and that the essence of the Son is not so ; so that it must be an express contradiction to predicate these opposite and contradictory assertions of the same *numerical* essence—" In regard to this argument it may be sufficient to state, that the term *numerical*, on which its validity depends, implies finiteness, because it denotes something which may be numbered, as being externally distinct and separate from other things of the same kind. But with what propriety can such a term be applied to the infinite essence of the eternal and omnipresent

* Last Thoughts, p. 6.

God? How can that which is infinite be numbered, as externally distinct from other essences of the same kind, which are also infinite? The truth is that Whitby, in applying the term *numerical*, argues about the nature of God as finite, and then very naturally concludes, that not to conceive of the divine Persons as wholly distinct, would involve him in contradictions. The contradictions however arise from his own error, and belong not to a subject which is infinite, and cannot therefore be a fit object of our numeration.

The question, simply and fairly stated, is resolved into these two : 1. is it contradictory to believe, that God should, by derivation from himself, give being to other Agents, which should consequently possess all the attributes belonging to a divine nature, underived existence alone excepted, because, if this were not excluded, there would be a direct contradiction in terms ; and 2. is the human understanding adequate to perceive that, in a case in which the primary and the derived beings are all infinite, as being all possessed of a divine nature with its inherent attributes, there may not still subsist a unity of godhead, however inapplicable such a unity must be to finite existences, derived one from another according to the known laws of generation. When these two questions are thus plainly proposed, it will scarcely be maintained, that any contradic-

tion is involved in the former, or that the mind of man is competent to deny the possibility of the unity, which is the subject of the latter.

The inability of the human mind to contemplate infinity is best illustrated from arithmetic, the most distinct of all sciences. It is acknowledged that number, however unbounded, cannot reach to an actual infinity, for no number can be conceived so great, that it may not be increased, and this cannot be true of that which is already infinite. There is indeed a part of this science, which has been named the arithmetic of infinites; but it should rather have been named the arithmetic of indefinites, for the quantities, which it contemplates, are merely greater than any assignable, and therefore are not understood to be actually infinite, but only to have no fixed and assignable limits. Though there are, both in geometry and in arithmetic, problems for determining the sum of an infinite series, yet the quantities are really finite, as these are series of decreasing terms, and the number of the terms is, as has been explained, indefinite, not actually infinite.

It may also be easily shown from a consideration of numbers, how fallacious is the inference from finite to infinite, for the very same principles of calculation, which in finite numbers are strictly and universally true, become fruitful of absurd and contradictory consequences, when an attempt is made to apply them

to cases involving the consideration of infinity. It is in arithmetic an undoubted principle, that every dividend is equal to the product formed by multiplying the divisor by the quotient: it is also certain that if, while the dividend is unvaried, the divisor be increased in any ratio, the quotient will be diminished in a corresponding ratio. Let these principles be applied in a case, in which the divisor has been supposed to be augmented to infinity, and consequently the quotient to be diminished to nothing, and the dividend, whatsoever number it may happen to be, must be equal to the product of the same two terms, namely, infinity and nothing. If now the latter be considered as ~~an~~ *forming with*

*infinity, a
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~~term~~, all numbers would be equal; if, as in finite cases, it be conceived to reduce the product to nothing, the dividend must therefore be nothing, and all numbers would be annihilated. In either case the science of arithmetic is extinguished by the application of its own principles. If it be said, that the ordinary rules of arithmetical reasoning are not applicable to such a case, let * a similar reserve be maintained in contemplating the infinity of the godhead, to

* Locke indeed has represented the idea of God as formed by enlarging with infinity those qualities, which we find in our own minds, and conceive it better to have than to want. Essay on the Hum. Underst. b. 2. ch. 23. §. 33. The expression is however inaccurate, and should have been "by conceiving those qualities to be indefinitely enlarged."

which the properties of limited, and therefore numerical existence, must be not less inapplicable.

That infinity, which, it is conceived, should preclude men from applying their puny reasonings to the essence of the Divinity, is itself distinctly stated in the creed, though, on account of a change of the signification of a term, the clause is now commonly understood in a different sense. "The Father," we are taught to say, "is incomprehensible, the Son incomprehensible, and the Holy Ghost incomprehensible." The term is commonly understood to mean, that the three Persons of the Trinity are inconceivable; but this is a vulgar error. The word *incomprehensible* anciently signified *that which cannot be contained*, and was accordingly used by Hooker as equivalent to *infinite*. The original word also of the creed is *immensus*, which ascertains the true sense of the term used in the translation. We have therefore in the creed itself an explicit statement, that the divine Persons are, not inconceivable, which would render the creed absurd, but infinite, not to be confined within any bounds, to which the mind of man could extend its reasonings.

It may however be urged that, so far as human reasoning can proceed, it is even favourable to the doctrine, which the athanasian creed maintains as the true faith of a christian. All the reasoning, which has been employed to

investigate the characters of the divine nature, has tended to establish the unity of God. In regard to this part of the doctrine therefore no difficulty can exist. In regard to its plurality the speculations of Plato have approached so near to the trinitarian doctrine of christians, that some, though without any real probability, have supposed them to be notions transmitted by tradition from an early revelation; and even bishop Horseley * has expressed a disposition to explain christianity by the doctrine of that philosopher. Nor is it merely in the philosophy of Plato that we find a support given by human reasoning to the doctrine of the plurality of the divine nature, for it is agreeable to all analogy. We observe that all living beings have been endowed by their Creator with the power of communicating a derivative existence; and may naturally conclude, that the Father of all is not destitute of a power in such a manner analogous to that, which he has bestowed upon his creatures, as might be correspondent to the infinite superiority of his own perfect nature. The analogy is even acknowledged in the divine revelation, by the adoption of terms expressive of the derived existence of a human progeny. Since then human reason would establish the unity of the divine nature, and since not only philosophic speculation, but the

* Horseley's Tracts, p. 77, 515, 516.

analogy of our own ordinary observation, would lead us to the acknowledgment of a derivation from it, we should conclude, though we are unable to explain the mystery, that the revealed trinity is not inconsistent with the unity of God. The doctrine therefore of a trinity in unity is supported by our own reasoning in each of its parts; and that these parts are contradictory can never be demonstrated, because this question relates to a consideration placed quite beyond our comprehension, that of the manner in which the nature of an infinite being may be communicated by derivation.

A great difficulty has been conceived to exist in the doctrine of the eternity of the derived Persons of the Trinity, and it has accordingly been urged again and again, that, as an effect must be posterior to its cause, these cannot be admitted to be coeternal to the Father in regard to antecedent duration.

For the solution of this difficulty bishop Horseley* has resorted to the speculations of the platonizing fathers, who, agreeably to the doctrine of their favourite philosopher, held that the intellect of the Father must, by the necessary energy of its nature, have generated the Son from all eternity, as the mind of man must from the beginning of its existence generate a thought. But this solution, on which

* Horseley's Tracts, p. 515, 516.

however the bishop does not insist, is collected from a very slight analogy, for the thought of the human mind has no personal existence; and moreover it is not applied, and does not seem to be in any manner applicable, to the Holy Spirit.

Bishop Bull, whom bishop Horseley has generally followed, had * stated with approbation a solution of this mystery, which appears to have been devised by Athenagoras, a distinguished writer of the second century. He conceived that the Son had from all eternity existed in the Father, but was manifested as a distinct Person a short time before the creation, that he might be the agent of the work. This solution however the author of this treatise confesses himself wholly unable to comprehend, for he cannot understand how a derived being can be said to have existed before he was generated, nor can he perceive what authority can be alleged from the sacred writings to prove, that the generation of the Son preceded but by a short interval, or by any assignable interval, the creation of the world.

John, in his gospel, says, that the Word "was in the beginning with God," but he does not say, that the Word was then first manifested in distinct personality. Consistently with the meaning of the expression he might have ex-

* Defensio Fid. Nic. Sect. 3. cap. 5. § 4.

isted with the Father from eternity, in the same manner in which he was represented to have existed "in the beginning," for it merely states, that he then existed with God, when the world was to be made. The opinion, that the distinct personality of our Saviour had then its commencement, receives indeed some apparent support from the authorised version of the passage of the epistle to the Colossians already noticed, in which he is described as "the first-born of every creature." This translation however the author of this treatise trusts that he * has shown to be incorrect. If the original words should be interpreted, not *the first-born of every creature*, but *the begotten before all creation*, there is no necessity for supposing any other existence of the Son, than that which was given by this generation, the time of which is perfectly undefined.

It will be readily acknowledged, that it could no more have been the purpose of a divine revelation, to instruct mankind in the metaphysical notion of duration, than in the physical conception of the planetary system. We find accordingly no expression, by which the nature of the eternity of God is intimated. All which

* See pages 85—88 of this treatise. Justin M. a greek writer early in the second century, must have understood the passage as it has been here interpreted, for, in evident allusion to it, he says *Γινόντις αὐτὸν πρωτότοκον μὲν τῷ θεῷ, καὶ πρὸ πάντων τῶν κτισμάτων.* p. 352. Lond. 1722.

was in this respect necessary for our information, was that we should be assured, that the Son had existed in glory with the Father before that creation, of which he was the agent. This therefore is * distinctly and satisfactorily declared. Any further communication would have unnecessarily involved us in all the embarrassment of a metaphysical discussion of eternal duration. The creed does indeed assert, that the derived Persons of the Trinity are coeternal to the Father. The assertion is not however made in reference to any metaphysical notion of eternal duration, but merely as belonging to their participation of the same godhead. Fortunately in this particular the creed explains itself, and no man needs to suppose, that he is required by it to pronounce upon a question of metaphysics. When the creed enters into particulars, it recurs to the simple language of the scripture, and states, in perfect correspondence to the interpretation of the passage of the epistle to the Colossians already proposed, that the Son had been "begotten before the worlds," or, as it has been more distinctly expressed in the original creed, *before the ages*. We are therefore authorised by the creed itself to say, that, when the derived Persons of the Trinity are stated to be co-eternal to the Father, the meaning is that they so

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* John, ch. 1. v. 1, 2, 3. ch. 17. v. 5. Ep. to the Philip. ch. 2. v. 6. Ep. to the Coloss. ch. 1. v. 15. Ep. to the Hebr. ch. 1.

participate the same godhead, that their existence is not comprehended within any duration, to which our measures of time have any reference. Such a statement is scriptural, not metaphysical.

The curiosity of the human mind however is not satisfied with this simplicity of statement, and it becomes necessary, for the vindication of revealed truth, to enter into those metaphysical considerations, which could not with propriety constitute a part of revelation. It is objected that the Son must, as such, have been posterior in time to the Father, and therefore cannot have been coeternal in regard to antecedent duration. But this objection assumes, that the duration of an infinitely perfect being must correspond to our own, and be, like it, distinguished into successive periods of time. What reason can we have for trusting to such an analogy? To us time is marked by the succession of ideas in our minds, which are too limited for contemplating ideas in any other manner, than by succession. Why should we suppose, that the infinitely perfect mind must in its contemplations be limited like our own? Is it conceivable that a mind so limited could superintend by its providence all the concerns of the created universe? Is it not, 'on the contrary, more reasonable to believe, that the infinitely perfect being, who has made, and still governs all things, should be wholly free from such a

limitation of his thoughts, and be able to contemplate all his ideas together? If this be admitted, our notion of duration is inapplicable to a divinely perfect being; and when we argue against the divinity of the Son from the notion of successive duration, we * in that very argument assume, that he is merely a created and finite being, and thus, as logicians say, reason in a circle, having no other support for our premises, than that which is gained by taking the conclusion for granted.

That there must be an essential distinction between our duration and that of God, was long ago perceived by Origen, when he was explaining that passage of the second psalm, in which the Father is represented as saying, "thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee." The interpretation of Origen is this: "it is said to him by God, to whom it is always today, for there is not an evening of God, and I am of opinion, that neither is there a morning, but time, that I may so speak, co-extending with his unbegotten and eternal life, the day is to

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* Doctor Bruce of all men should have been careful to avoid this sophism, for in his treatise on the Being and Attributes of God, he has come to this conclusion; "on the whole, beings, whose existence consists of successive periods, cannot have existed from eternity, either individually or in succession." p 39. Belfast 1818. Yet in his Sermons he has argued, that the title of the Son of God implies the priority of the Father, because "the origin of the Son, being a fact, *must have taken place at some particular time, however remote.*" p. 108.

him today, in which the Son was begotten, a beginning of his generation being thus not found, as neither of the day." Origen appears to have derived this opinion from that platonic philosophy, to which he was so much attached, the permanent existence of archetypal ideas in the divine mind naturally suggesting to him that the existence of the supreme being could have no relation to the succession of the perishable objects of human observation. He has been * followed in it by the whole train of platonizing fathers, and lastly, among the admirers of platonism, by the celebrated Cudworth, who has distinctly † said that, before the beginning of time, there must have been a mind, which should be unacquainted with the gliding series of mutually succeeding times, and should contain and embrace together in the stable and unchangeable perfection of its nature, that which we name the past, the present, and the future time. Nor has this opinion of the existence of an infinitely perfect being been confined to those, who were attached to the philosophy of Plato : many others have embraced it, and it has been strenuously maintained by bishop Law in his comment on archbishop King's treatise of the Origin of Evil.

If it be now demanded, why should the term *eternal* be introduced at all into a creed, if it be

* Cudworthi Systema Intellect. tom. 2. p. 39, not. Lugd. Bat. 1773.

† Ibid. p. 38.

acknowledged that the only notion of duration, which we can distinctly form, is not applicable to the existence of the Deity, the answer is, that this was deemed necessary for excluding the grand principle of the arians, that there was a time, when the Son was not, from which they concluded, that he was a created, and therefore an infinitely inferior being. We may accordingly distinguish two statements of the creed concerning the duration of the Son, one relative to created things, the other relative to the Father. In the former he is represented as "begotten before the worlds," or *the ages*, this being sufficient for a just conception of him, as the being by whom all things were made, and the only representation which could be to us distinctly intelligible. The other described him as coeternal to the Father, not as conveying to us a positive conception of their common eternity, which is impossible, but that it might negatively exclude a conception, which would class the second Person of the Trinity with created beings, and had been formed with this very design.

If a difficulty be found in understanding that part of the creed, which treats of the incarnation of our Saviour, describing him as "perfect God and perfect man, of a reasonable soul and human flesh subsisting," it may be sufficiently removed, by considering what was the bearing of the clause. Ignorant as we are, not only of

the nature of the godhead, but even of our own, we must be unable to conceive the union of the two natures in the same being. This however cannot be a reason for rejecting the doctrine as inadmissible, since * we have reason to conclude that our own nature itself is not simple, but compounded of three distinct principles, of that vitality of organization, which we possess in common with even the vegetable creation, of the principle of voluntary motion, which we hold in common with brute animals, and of that intellectual power, which is peculiar to ourselves, and constitutes us the masters of this terrestrial globe. Disregarding then this difficulty, as one with which we are already familiar, we may sufficiently collect the meaning of the creed from a consideration of the heresy of Apollinaris, to which it was in this part opposed. That heresiarch had taught, that Christ assumed merely a human body, the divine λόγος, or the Word, acting as a soul; and it was plainly the purpose of the composer of the creed to state, on the contrary, that our Saviour assumed the whole nature, and not merely the corporeal form of man.

If we have been told in the sacred writings, that Jesus Christ was "made in the likeness of men," and that he was "found in fashion as a man," these expressions should be interpreted

*Remarks on Scepticism, by the Rev. T. Rennell B. D. *Christian Advocate* in Cambr. p. 91, 92. Lond. 1823.

as signifying, not merely the exterior appearance, but the inherent character with its attributes. Our Saviour has been accordingly described, in * the epistle to the Hebrews, as having taken on himself, not merely a human body, but “the seed of Abraham;” and it is added, that therefore “in all things it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren.”—We should therefore understand the meaning of this part of the creed to be, that the entire nature of man was, in the person of Jesus Christ, united with the divine λόγος, or the Word, the divinity of the proper character of our Lord being retained, and yet subjected to a feeling of all the weaknesses of humanity, “though without sin.” The first Adam had been formed without sin, and the second Adam, by whose interposition the penalty incurred by the former was removed, was so fashioned in our nature, as to be nevertheless free from the impurity, which the former had contracted, and entailed upon his posterity.

The author of the creed has been so solicitous to maintain against the arians the divinity of our Saviour, that he has said little of the primary dignity of the Father, and it may even be supposed, that the acknowledgment of that dignity has been wholly omitted. This however is not so. The primary dignity of the Father is distinctly acknowledged in the creed. In the

* Ch. 2. v. 16, 17.

first place, the existence of the Father is represented as underived, whereas that of the Son and that of the Holy Spirit are stated to have been derived from him, each in a peculiar mode, which has not been explained, and probably could not, even by divine revelation itself, have been rendered intelligible to our faculties. Nor is this all, for, in the latter part of the creed, our Saviour is described as sitting, after his ascension, “on the right hand of the Father, *God Almighty*.” Here is a distinct acknowledgment, that the divine character, though common to the three Persons, is by preeminence applicable peculiarly to him, who is the only self-existent Person. The unity of the godhead is in this manner maintained, not by any metaphysical subtleties concerning the communication of properties, and the identity of a substantial nature, but simply by attributing to the three Persons a participation of one common divinity, underived, and therefore primary, in the Father, who “is made of none, neither created, nor begotten.” The unity of the godhead is thus the unity of the Father, comprehending, by some unknown derivations, the Persons of the Son and Holy Spirit.

The history of the creed affords a curious and strong confirmation of this interpretation. The words *God Almighty* are * not found in

* Waterland, p. 241.

the more ancient manuscripts after the word *Father* ; nor in the most ancient is any epithet whatsoever connected with that name. It seems however to have been early perceived, that sufficient care had not been used to express the primary dignity of the first Person of the sacred Trinity. The epithet *almighty* was accordingly first joined to the name of *the Father*, and afterwards was used alone to designate the first Person. This epithet was then omitted, and the word *God* was substituted in its place, connected with *the Father*. The two terms were afterwards combined with the word *Father*, though not in the same order, in which they occur in the english translation, the latin phrase being “*dextram Dei Patris Omnipotentis.*” These successive changes appear to indicate a continued anxiety to characterise the primary dignity of the Father, at first not sufficiently considered in the controversy with those, who denied the divine dignity of the Son. It may be thought, that our english translation, “on the right hand of the Father, God Almighty,” by placing together the two characteristic terms *God* and *Almighty*, exhibits a more distinct and determinate assertion of the primary dignity of the Father, than even the latest form of the latin creed, in which these terms and *the Father* are promiscuously connected in one compounded description.

That no epithet should have been originally

added, is easily explained from this consideration, that no epithet is added in the corresponding part of the nicene creed, which had been composed about a century before, and was probably in the contemplation of the author. It seems to have been afterwards perceived, that in that other creed a sufficient, and indeed a very strong acknowledgment, of the primary dignity of the Father had been made in the introductory sentence; and as the athanasian creed contained no passage corresponding to that introductory sentence, in which it might be introduced, the acknowledgment was then, though with some variations, inserted in that, which corresponded to the other.

The creed does indeed assert that “in this Trinity none is afore, or after other; none is greater or less than another:” but the acknowledged advocates of orthodoxy agree in explaining this only of perfection, or of duration. Bishop Bull* maintains, that the subordination of the Son is as much a part of the true faith, as the doctrine of his eternity, or consubstantiality. Bishop † Pearson, while he contends for the preeminence of the Father, remarks of the passage last quoted from the athanasian creed, that we must understand it of the priority of perfection, or time. Doctor Waterland‡ observes of the same passage, that

* *Defensio Fidei Nicænæ*, Sect. 4. † *Exposition of the Creed*, p. 34, 37. ‡ *Crit. Hist. of the Athan. Creed*, p. 260, 261.

we are not to understand it of order, or of office, for the Father is first in order, and supreme in office; but, *as the creed itself explains it*, of duration and dignity. The opinion of these writers is also approved by bishop Horseley, * who charges his adversary with misrepresentation, in insinuating that he, by maintaining the entire independence of the three Persons, would set them at a greater distance, than the athanasians of the preceding age allowed.

The comparison of the athanasian with the nicene creed, just now made in regard to the priority of the Father, may supply another argument, confirming the reasoning already urged to prove, that the damnatory clauses contained in the former were merely declaratory of the denunciation already pronounced by our Saviour, and not at all applied to the particular tenets of the creed. The creed of Nice was formed in a general council of bishops, and was therefore invested with all the authority, which an assembly of the church could bestow, instead of being, like the athanasian creed, the unaccredited work of an individual bishop, composed merely for the regulation of the opinions of his own vicinage. That assembly, excited by a strong disapprobation of the

* Horseley's Tracts, p. 205.

arian heresy, concluded its decree with * a damnatory sentence, by which all those were anathematised, who should hold any opinion contradictory to the divinity of the Son. Their sentence however has been omitted, and the creed has come down to posterity divested of this denunciation. Is it then reasonable to

“ And those who say, there was a time when the Son of God was not, or that he did not exist before he was begotten, and that he was made out of things not existing, or who say that he was of another substance or essence, or that he was created, or convertible, or mutable, the catholic and apostolic church anathematises them.” Socratis Hist. Eccles. lib. 1. c. 8.

Though this anathema has been abandoned by the church, yet, as it forms a part of the history of the nicene creed, it may be useful and satisfactory to explain that part of it, which condemns those who say, that the Son “ did not exist before he was begotten.” This indeed has already been well done by doctor Randolph. “ Some ancient writers,” says he, “ had represented the Son as coming forth from the Father, and manifesting his divine power and glory in the creation of the world : and this manifestation they called by the name of generation, though they constantly maintained that he existed with, and in the Father, before this manifestation or generation. Of this the arians took advantage, and finding that this manifestation or coming forth of the Son had been called his generation, they from thence inferred, that he did not exist before. And this gave birth to those phrases, which the arians affected to use—*there was a time when the Son was not—he did not exist before he was begotten—he was made out of nothing.* By these phrases they meant to express that the Son was not really and actually eternal : and the nicene fathers condemned these phrases in the sense in which these heretics used them, thereby intending to assert and establish the real and actual eternity of the Son. Vind. of the Doct. of the Trinity, p. 115, 116.

believe, that another creed, having the same object indeed of proscribing arianism, but destitute of all authority except that which was derived from the justness of its principles, should have been in the next century framed in a spirit, which had not been admitted by the church in the expression of the sentiments of a general council? The difficulty is however removed, if it be supposed that the denunciations of the athanasian creed were understood to have no direct reference to the creed itself, but to be ^{merely} declaratory.

Doctor Buchanan has * stated, that the creed of the syrian christians accords with the athanasian, but without the damnatory clauses. From this observation it might be hastily inferred, that these clauses had been disapproved and rejected, like the anathema originally annexed to that of Nice. But the particulars of the syrian creed, which he has subjoined to this observation, sufficiently prove that it was wholly a distinct profession of faith, though agreeing in doctrine with the athanasian. No argument therefore can be founded on it, except as it proves the wide and general establishment of the trinitarian doctrine; and the difference existing between the two creeds in regard to damnatory declarations, is sufficiently explained from the consideration, that the

* Christian Researches in Asia, p. 125. Lond. 1811.

athanasian was addressed to ignorant barbarians, who required to be roused to a sense of the indispensable importance of a right faith, by pressing upon their attention the solemn declaration of their Saviour.

“ Were I, says * bishop Horseley, “ to undertake the defence of the damnatory clause in the athanasian creed, it should indeed be upon this principle, that it is a thing somewhat of the same nature with the anathema annexed to the nicene. The anathema is no part of the nicene creed ; it is only a sentence of the church, against the impugnors of a particular article. What is called the damnatory clause, is no part of the athanasian. It is a clause, not of the creed, but of a prefatory sentence, in which the author declares his opinion of the importance of the rule of faith he is about to deliver.” In this passage there is much softening, for it represents only as the opinion of the author of the creed, that which every member of the established church is required to repeat as expressing his own sentiments. It is not indeed recited as a part of the christian faith, but it is certainly recited as declaring the persuasion of each individual concerning that faith. The just view of the subject seems rather to be, that both the anathema of the nicene, and the damnatory declarations of the athanasian creed,

* Horseley's Tracts, p. 322, note.

were understood to be proposed, not indeed as articles of faith necessary to salvation, but as declarations to be solemnly made ; and that, while the anathema was discontinued, because it was felt to be presumptuous to sanction in a manner so solemn a human exposition of faith, the damnatory declarations were nevertheless retained, because it was perceived, that they merely repeated the denunciation of Jesus Christ.

When protestants have charged the church of Rome with holding the doctrine of exclusive salvation, the accusation has commonly been answered by referring them to the athanasian creed, as maintaining a doctrine not less exclusive. If it has been shown that this is not indeed the character of the athanasian creed, the exclusive pretension of the church of Rome must be defended on some other ground, or abandoned to the attack. The athanasian creed, it is contended, does not limit the hope of christian salvation to those who profess that, which it however states to be "the catholic," or christian "faith." It only admonishes all christians of the importance of a true faith to their everlasting interest.

In these observations the author trusts that he has shown, that the parts of the athanasian creed, which have been understood to condemn to everlasting perdition, those who should not faithfully hold the particular opinions detailed

in the creed, are really but declaratory of the judgment of our Saviour, recorded by Mark the evangelist, and have been introduced only that attention may be awakened to a subject of so great importance : that the creed does not propose any metaphysical explanation whatsoever of the doctrines which it maintains, but, asserting them in an authoritative manner, refers all to the scriptures as revealed truths : that the apparent contradictions in the statements of the creed arise only from the negations opposed to the contrary errors of those, who on the one part rejected the divinity of Christ and the Holy Spirit, and on the other maintained an entire distinctness of three divine beings : that the divine unity is represented as consisting in a common godhead, in which however the Father, being the only underived Person, and the source of the divinity of the others, is especially distinguished by the title of God Almighty, as of primary dignity : that the difficulty of this great mystery consists in the utter inadequateness of our limited faculties to comprehend any infinite object, and should therefore be considered as exclusively to be referred to the authority of revelation : that the question of the eternity of the Son belongs to a consideration of existence, to which we know that we cannot apply our notion of successive time, though we are incapable of conceiving existence independently of succes-

sion ; and that the assertion of it can be understood by us only as the negation of an opinion, which would degrade the Son from a participation of the divine nature to the infinitely inferior rank of a created being : and that the doctrine of the incarnation, as stated in the creed, could be so stated only for maintaining, that the second Person of the Trinity did take upon him our whole nature, and did not merely assume a human body, and the outward semblance of a man.

If these things have indeed been shown, no reason will remain for rejecting this creed, except a disbelief of the doctrines of the trinity and the incarnation, which form its sum and substance. It has been vindicated from the three grand charges which represent it as uncharitable, as metaphysical, and as contradictory ; and its details have been shown to be such only, as belong necessarily to the full statement of the two principal doctrines. If it has entered into particulars not specified in the earlier creeds, it has been because the errors of heresy had induced a necessity of avoiding the ambiguity of more general language ; but the doctrine of the creed has been shown to be substantially the same, though expressed with more detail for precluding misrepresentation.

The history of the creed should enhance its authority, for it appears to have arisen out of the

necessity of the church, and * to have procured by its own intrinsic recommendations, without the sanction of any general council, a reception so general, that it may vie with that attributed to the apostles, and it has been only less extended than that which had been prepared by the council of Nice. It was not framed amidst the contentions of polemical theologians, but appears to have been the work of one eminent bishop for the instruction of his own diocese, and thence to have been generally adopted, as the most effectual preservative of the christian faith amidst contending heresies. The infidel historian of the roman empire has † indeed recorded, with evident gratification, that, when this creed was presented to the patriarch of Constantinople, that prelate treated it as the work of a drunken man; but he has not remarked, that the patriarch was deeply interested in depreciating a creed, which, ‡ by stating that the Holy Spirit proceeded both from the Father and from the Son, struck at the distinctness of the church, over which he presided, and consequently at the independence of his own patriarchal character.

* Waterland, p. 180. † Decline and Fall etc. vol. 3. p. 464, note.

‡ This statement, which was in the west agreeable to the prevailing doctrine, was in the year 653 introduced into the nicene creed by the sixth council of Toledo, and gave occasion, or rather pretext, to the greek schism, which was primarily the result of the jealousy entertained by the greek patriarch in regard to the see of Rome. Vossius de Tribus Symbolis.

The mystery of the creed it has not been the endeavour of the author to expound. What mortal shall dare to penetrate the obscurity of the divine essence? “No * man (or rather, *no one*) knoweth the Son, but the Father; neither knoweth any man (or *any one*) the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal him.” Our knowledge of the divine nature must be derived wholly from revelation, and must be strictly limited to that measure of information, which the Son of God has vouchsafed to communicate. The effort of the author has in this respect been directed merely to show, that the creed contains no ambitious refinement of human speculation on a subject far exceeding our compresension; that it has inculcated the unity of God, by maintaining the underived, and therefore primary divinity of the Father, and the derivative divinity of the other Persons of the Trinity; and that whatever of difficulty is found in this doctrine of the trinity in unity, results from our natural inability to comprehend the derivation of an infinite nature, not from any contradiction, which human metaphysics could either explain, or expose.

We, who are subjected in our limited existence to the relations both of time and space, communicate by an outward generation our

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* Matt. ch. 11. v. 27.

nature to beings separated from us in both respects, and becoming agents wholly distinct. But who will therefore say that the eternal and omnipresent God, subject in himself to no such limitations, must yet communicate his nature under these limitations, and constitute beings separated from the divine unity, as one man, is separated from another? No analogy exists between the two cases sufficiently close, to authorise any sober reasoner in inferring a contradiction in the one, from that which would be a contradiction in the other. The gulf which separates finite, from infinite, lies in the way of such an inference. Who can pass it? The derivation of the divine nature is not, by any correspondence to that which we know, subject to our judgments, and we must therefore receive it simply on the testimony of God.

Since arianism has been recommended as the best expedient for escaping from the difficulties of such a creed, let it be considered, how much must even human knowledge be contracted, if it should be reduced to that, which involved no difficulty yet unravelled. In the study of nature we should be stopped at once, for we know nothing of the real nature of the powers, by which the most ordinary and familiar effects are produced. We know not why a stone falls to the ground, we know not why certain substances crystallise into certain forms, by what principle the parts of bodies cohere, and how even the functions of our own

bodies are performed. We know and can trace the effects, and class them under certain laws of action; but these laws are not the powers which produce them, and the causes for ever elude our research. In the very commencement of geometry, a science of boasted demonstration, we should be checked by our inability to explain, agreeably to scientific principles, the nature of parallelism, so as to give demonstrative certainty to our reasonings. In moral enquiry we find every thing vague and uncertain, until we seek the sanctions of moral laws in religion, and the religion of unassisted nature would soon send us to revelation with all its mysteries, for supplying the deficiencies of reason. To metaphysics the man who is anxious to escape from difficulties, would scarcely resort, incapable as this part of human knowledge is of being subjected to the observations of sense, and equally embarrassed with the study of external nature by an irremediable ignorance of the substantial essence of its object.

The man therefore, who objects to the doctrine of the divine trinity proposed in the creed, because he would escape from difficulty, should on the same principle deny the existence of a God, that he might escape from the great and inconceivable difficulty of a creation. He must then withdraw his mind from all the enquiries, to which it might be solicited for the analysis of

natural substances, for at every step he would encounter affinities of attraction, which no mortal can explain. From all the admirable devices, which human ingenuity has contrived for the assistance of human labour, he should likewise shrink. The ordinary inventions of mechanics he must shun, because he knows nothing of that gravity, which is the actuating principle, and is baffled in the very elements of that geometry, by which the action of engines is reduced to rules: and since he cannot render any satisfactory account of the expansive force of steam, he should therefore escape also from the difficulty of the steam-engine. The stupendous system of the material heavens should for the same reason engage no share of his attention; he knows not the nature of the force, which controls its movements, and in reasoning about them he should avoid the difficulty of using an instrument so embarrassing as geometry. He cannot consistently use food for the support of his corporeal frame, or medicine for the relief of its ailments, because, ignorant as he is of the principle of vitality, he finds it impossible perfectly to understand, how food furnishes his sustenance, or medicine mitigates his sufferings. If respiration were an act requiring volition, he should refrain from it, for it involves difficulties, from which he is in consistency bound to escape; but as this action is performed independently of volition, it may

be permitted to him, until the frame shall perish, in the suspension of every one, in which volition is concerned. In that short interval he should not turn his mind inward upon itself, for there he must be embarrassed by all the difficulties of metaphysics; and the only occupation, which appears to be reconcilable to his principle, is that of computing the number of surrounding objects, or of the pulsations of his own ebbing existence, for computation is the single science free from difficulty.

Since then it is manifestly impossible to act consistently on this plan of escaping from difficulty, let us be contented to avail ourselves of all the means of information, to whatever extent they may enable us to proceed. Let us prosecute scientific enquiry so far as we can discover a sure track of knowledge, though it may be bordered, and even in some degree actually embarrassed by difficulties, which we are unable to remove; and let us with thankfulness accept from God those communications relative to our spiritual interests, which human reason must be unable to anticipate for itself, anxious only to ascertain what is their real import, and not at all considering what interpretation would bring them down most nearly to the level of the deductions of our own faculties. Man will in this manner receive all the improvement, of which he is

capable. He will acquire for himself all the knowledge, which his faculties are naturally fitted to procure, and he will add to this all the information, which revelation alone can bestow, submitting in his own enquiries to difficulties, which he cannot overcome, and receiving implicitly every well authenticated testimony of God, which should appear to be not repugnant to that of his own senses and understanding, employed * about objects so bounded, as to be perfectly comprehended within their cognisance.

* This limitation, of which the reasonableness is manifest, excludes the comparison, which infidels and unitarians are fond of instituting between the doctrine of the trinity and that of transubstantiation. The former relates to the unseen nature of the infinite God ; the latter to an object of very moderate magnitude, and subject to the examination of our senses.

APPENDIX.

Observations on the state of the presbyterian church of Ireland.

THE publication, which gave occasion to this treatise, having grown out of a dissension of religion, which has long prevailed in the presbyterian church of this country, it may not be improper to subjoin some observations on the constitution of that church, addressed particularly to the attention of its own members. At a time when, even in the legislature of the empire, a union of the protestant established church of Ireland with the church of Rome has been seriously suggested, it appears to be seasonable for every protestant, of whatever description, to consider seriously with himself, whether another union of churches less dissimilar might not more reasonably be proposed. The observations, which are here offered, are prompted by this spirit of union, and therefore, it is trusted, can scarcely by any misconception give occasion to an unfriendly feeling.

The presbyterians of Ireland are fortunately placed in circumstances not adverse to forming a connection with the established church. Though the presbyterians of England * had separated from the established church of that country in the year 1566, yet in the settlement of the northern province of Ireland, begun in the year 1609, or forty-three years after that separation, their

* Neal's Hist. of the Puritans, vol. 1. p. 205. Bath 1795.

clergy* were received into the parochial preferments, which † they continued to hold until the year 1657, when they were driven from them by the lord lieutenant Henry Cromwell, for refusing to swear allegiance to his brother the protector. After the restoration the policy of assimilating the established church of Ireland to that of England prevailed; and as, by a new and more comprehensive act of uniformity the presbyterian ministers, who had in the civil war taken possession of the parochial benefices of England, were compelled to retire, so in Ireland it was determined, that the ministers ejected by Henry Cromwell should not be reinstated. In this country however a kinder consideration of their loss was entertained, and ‡ an annual sum of five hundred pounds was allowed for their support, which annuity, denominated a *regium donum*, was after the Revolution augmented to twelve hundred pounds, and at present, for the province of Ulster alone, exceeds fifteen thousand, with an indefinite power of increase, as new congregations should be formed. Though the presbyterian ministers of the other provinces had never been admitted to the benefices of the establishment, yet in the reign of Anne they also received an annuity of eight hundred pounds, which has since been augmented in the same manner as that of the northern ministers.

The presbyterian ministers of Ireland had been thus originally nurtured within the establishment, long after a decisive separation had occurred in England; from this situation they were driven, not by the regular government of the country, but by a temporary usurpation, to which they nobly refused to submit; and, though it was afterwards deemed prudent to maintain their exclusion, for the purpose of assimilating the ecclesiastical

* Hist. of Dissenters by Bogue and Bennett, vol. 2. p. 411. † Ibid. p. 416. ‡ Ibid. p. 417-419.

establishment of this country to that of England; yet a provision was made for the ejected ministers, which has since been largely augmented. If the original provision should appear very scanty and insufficient, it should be recollected, that the benefices must have been of very inconsiderable value, in a country in which a settlement had been begun but forty-eight years before, during a third part of which time the province of Ulster had been ravaged by rebellion and civil war.

The political circumstances of the Irish presbyterians are also such, that no impediment can present itself on account of any distinction, for in this country the disqualification of the test-act was late imposed, and early removed, having been enacted in the year 1703, and repealed in the year 1779. No political jealousy therefore can now exist on either part, which could at this time disturb the harmony of the two classes of protestants, and oppose a closer and more intimate union. Both are equal in the enjoyment of political privileges; both are in their churches protected and supported by the government; and such is the confidence reposed by the state in the good feelings of the presbyterians of Ireland towards the establishment, that they have been by law permitted to assist in vestries assembled for regulating and assessing the parochial expenses.

It seems not easy to conceive a combination of circumstances more favourable for considering dispassionately this most interesting question; what is it, beyond merely traditionary feeling and the influence of habit, which now hinders presbyterians from connecting themselves with the established church, and forming one united body of protestants. Even these causes indeed operate at this time very feebly, for presbyterians, and their very ministers, do not hesitate to educate their sons for the ministry of the establishment; so that

really it would seem that, in this country, the question requires only to be fairly submitted to public discussion. Who can be sincerely attached to the cause of true religion, and not consider the question as of vital importance?

The actual circumstances of the presbyterian church of Ireland may dispose the more serious and reflecting members of that body, to regard the question as more especially interesting to themselves, for they may lead them to consider, whether they have any sufficient security for the maintenance of a sound faith.

The standard of religious opinion in the church of Scotland, from which the presbyterian church of Ireland has been derived, is the confession framed at Westminster in the year 1745, which in that country, as has been stated to the author, is subscribed twice by every minister of that church. This confession however, which was framed in all the rigour of the calvinistic doctrines, is not equally respected in the more lax constitution of the presbyterian church of Ireland, for each congregation may exercise a power of withholding any public enquiry into the religious sentiments of the person, whom they invite to be their minister. The consequence of this relaxation is that ministers, believed to be arians, are heard in their synods, professing to have formed their opinions for themselves exclusively from the sacred scriptures, and declaring their dissent from others acknowledged to be orthodox.

A church so constituted may fairly be described as one without a confession of faith, for a conformity to its acknowledged confession is enforced only according to the pleasure of each particular congregation; and accordingly it may perhaps be truly said, that the religious opinions of its congregations, with those of their ministers, vary through every gradation of theological

opinion, from the trinitarian calvinism of the confession of Westminster down to simple arianism. A large proportion however, it is believed, are sound in their faith, and cherish the independency of their ecclesiastical system for the sake of that independency, rather than as a protection for opinions disagreeing from the original standard of their church.

As the ministers of the presbyterian church of Ireland are not generally required to subscribe an acknowledged confession of faith, so neither do the laity profess their adherence to any of those forms of doctrine, which have been denominated creeds. These were originally used in the baptismal service, and were afterwards introduced into the general liturgy of the church. As the presbyterians, though they administer baptism to infants, admit no sponsors, they cannot use a creed on such occasions, and, having no authorised liturgy, they have no opportunity of introducing one into the public service of their congregations.

A church, which neither demands of its ministers a confession of their faith, nor admits a creed for declaring the belief of its congregations, might be supposed to be destitute of every restraint, which could secure the stability of its tenets. External events have however very curiously provided a principle of restraint, which in some imperfect degree supplies the deficiency of internal regulation.

The * early avowal of arianism in the university of Glasgow, to which the candidates for the presbyterian ministry of Ireland resorted for education, was soon extended to this country; and the presbytery of Antrim was on that account in the year 1726 separated from the general synod, as heretical, though still permitted to retain its concern in the distribution of the *regium*

* Hist. of Dissenters, vol. 4. p. 79-82.

donum, and for that purpose only to send its deputies to the meetings of the synod. A reaction on the other hand having occurred in the church of Scotland, a body of seceders was in the year 1736 formed in that country, professing to recur to the original principles of the church, which they considered as then generally abandoned. This separation also was speedily propagated into the northern province of Ireland, where accordingly a body of presbyterian seceders was formed in the year 1740. The synod of Ulster was in this manner flanked by two extreme parties of presbyterians, of which the presbytery of Antrim was avowedly arian, and the seceders were rigorously calvinistic; and probably was, by the natural action of these extreme parties, retained in an intermediate position, which a church so imperfectly constituted, could otherwise have scarcely maintained.

The disposition to lower the standard of religious opinion to arianism seems to have been restrained by a consideration of the proscribed situation of the presbytery of Antrim, in which that doctrine was openly professed; and the contrary disposition to adhere to the confession of Westminster was in the like manner moderated by the repulsion of the seceders, who had formally separated themselves from the general church, that they might more rigorously profess the tenets of that confession. Controlled, it appears, by these exterior agencies, the synod of Ulster, however various be the sentiments of its ministers and their congregations, has happily shunned the two extremes of open and acknowledged arianism and of rigorous unaccommodating calvinism, and doubtless comprehends within its jurisdiction a considerable number of persons, to whose religious opinions no member of the established church could reasonably make objection, as neither could they

assign any sufficient difference in this respect, to render separation necessary or desirable.

How much the presbyterian church of Ireland has been indebted to these exterior agencies, for the degree of steadiness which it has maintained, may best be estimated from a consideration of the general prevalence of socinian opinions in that of England. The english presbyterians, not being so closely connected with Scotland as those of the northern province of Ireland, all of whom traced their origin to that country, were not affected by the changes of the scotish church, and consequently had not been provided with those extreme classes of presbyterians, which were early formed in Ireland. The tendency to sink down into low opinions of the second Person of the Trinity, which calvinism * has generally manifested, has accordingly operated among them without any control whatsoever. They were not checked by the repulsive action of extreme sects, as neither were they, as in Scotland, subjected to that degree of restraint, which a regularly established system must of necessity impose.

Even however with the aid of these exterior agencies, a conscientious presbyterian, who reflects on the religious circumstances of his church, may reasonably doubt, whether he can securely depend on it for the religious instruction of himself and his family. Within the limits, by which it is thus contained, a great variety of religious principles may still be found, and where no confession is prescribed to the ministers, no creed recited by the laity, the doctrine of the church must fluctuate with the changing current of prevailing opinion. In a church so constituted indeed every incidental tendency to deterioration must be continually strengthened. If a minister be chosen for his popular

* See page 151—153.

talents, whose concealed opinions are heterodox, he will in his ministry so corrupt his congregation, that they will afterwards prefer a man, whose opinions are known to be of the same description, having no fixed standard either for his principles, or for their own.

If, to remove this uncertainty, the synod should be induced to recur to their ancient confession of faith, they would return to that, which, as has already been exemplified in every instance, has naturally tended to pass into that very arianism or socinianism, from which, in returning to it, they would endeavour to escape. What then would be gained by the change? They would have abandoned a system, in which very various opinions are held at the same time, for another, the natural tendency of which has actually shown itself to be, to an alternate movement between the extremes of calvinistic trinitarianism and of arianism or socinianism.

An established liturgy presents a difficulty in the way of union, though one, the importance of which, it is believed, is now much less highly estimated than in preceding times. It is doubtless impressive to hear an able minister praying, as if under the influence of a present inspiration from heaven; and if he were really so inspired, all must listen to him with awe and interest. But if the ministers of the presbyterian church do not receive the assistance of inspiration, many must furnish the public prayers in an inadequate, some in an extremely defective manner; and as even the ablest must find it expedient to premeditate their prayers, no sufficient reason seems to exist, why they should not also be prepared for the use of the congregation in a printed form. It is certainly possible, that a printed form should be read with as much devotion, as a premeditated prayer could be delivered without book, and the

form possesses this inestimable advantage, that the congregation is enabled to join with the minister in supplication, instead of merely listening to the words which he may utter, and which he renders as various, and consequently as unexpected, as his talents may enable him to do. It probably happens indeed, that a congregation becomes so familiar with the manner of its minister, that it is enabled often to anticipate the expressions, which he shall use in prayer. This advantage however only substitutes the customary supplications of an individual for the authorised forms of a liturgy, without any advantage in exciting interest by varied combinations of language. Independently of such an advantage, which is in truth but an approach to a settled liturgy, the only part of the public service, in which a presbyterian congregation can be said to join the minister, is the psalmody, and in this, because it is a printed form.

Besides the general disadvantage of not being prepared to unite in supplications not previously known, others of great importance have also arisen from the want of a settled liturgy. One of these is that the prayers form a much smaller part of the public observance of the sabbath, for the talents of the ministers cannot with the expected variety supply prayers sufficiently detailed. The sermon, or the lecture, delivered by the minister, thus becomes the great business of the congregation, which is accordingly assembled rather to hear the instruction of the preacher, perhaps to be gratified by the display of his ability, possibly to gratify themselves by pronouncing a judgment on the performance, than to have an opportunity of uniting their supplications, and of availing themselves of the benefit of that special presence, which Christ has in such a case promised to his followers. This is more especially

observable in the dutch church, in which * the time of the prayers has been reduced to about one fifth of that of the whole attendance. Another disadvantage is the discontinuance of the practice of reading the scriptures to the congregation. This practice had been only recommended to the church of Scotland in the directory for public worship, not ordained, as in that of England; and the consequence has been, that it is wholly abandoned. To this doctor Buchanan † has ascribed the general declension of the presbyterians of England into arianism and socinianism. Of the state of the church of his own country in this respect he seems to have been unwilling to deliver any opinion; but he has remarked that, if the people are indeed, as has been alleged, unwilling to hear the scriptures read in the churches, this fact is the strongest proof of the necessity of beginning to read them without delay.

Our Saviour has dictated a form of prayer, which, according ‡ to one evangelist, was to be actually used by Christians, and, according || to another, was to be the model of their imitation. We have observed the directions of both. We recite the prayer itself in every service, and we use other stated prayers, which pious men have composed in humble imitation of that unexceptionable form. That these are not unacceptable to presbyterians appears from this, that they have for domestic devotion a selection of the prayers of our liturgy; and § bishop Hacket and bishop Bull are known to have attracted the admiration of dissenters to our offices, when they recited them from memory.

* Fifteenth Report of the London Society for promoting Christianity among the Jews, Appendix, Journal of the Rev. A. S. Thelwall, p. 113.

† Christian Researches, p. 122—124. ‡ Luke, ch. 11. v. 2. || Matt. ch. 6. v. 9. § Gen. Biogr. Diction. vol. 17. p. 7, 8. Lond. 1814.

The athanasian creed has indeed been commonly mentioned, as an insuperable impediment to forming a union with the established church, this form of faith being generally regarded as an attempt to dictate imperiously to the consciences of men, prompted by a spirit of overweening and excessive refinement on the communications of God.

If however the author has been successful in endeavouring to prove, that this creed is not a collection of metaphysical refinements, but a simple statement of doctrines, as held to have been communicated in the sacred writings; and that to this simple statement no damnatory clause has really been annexed, the solemn denunciations of the creed referring only to the indispensable importance of a true faith in Christ; it may be hoped that this great impediment has at length been wholly removed, especially as * the doctrines of the creed have been specifically adopted in that confession, which was the original standard of the presbyterian church.

There was a time, when the dress of the clergy and some few ceremonies presented the great difficulties in the way of a union of protestants. Nor was it at that time unreasonable, that these things should be regarded with a jealous alienation of mind, for the established church was, in that early period of the reformed religion, regarded by those who affected a more perfect regeneration of religion, as influenced by a tendency to return to the doctrines and practices of Rome, of which these things were considered as unequivocal indications. As however no one can now suspect the established church of any disposition to relinquish the religion of the Bible for one corrupted by the inventions of men, these differences cannot any longer be considered as im-

* See page 5, note.

pediments. No presbyterian can now think, that the surplice of the established church is more favourable to the religion of Rome than the cloak of Geneva, or that to kneel at the administration of the Lord's Supper betrays any inclination to admit the doctrine of transubstantiation.

If the most efficient principle in maintaining the distinctness of the two churches be the gratification of choosing by a popular election the ministers employed in conducting the public worship of a congregation, and in superintending the spiritual concerns of the individuals who compose it, this gratification might remain undisturbed, for it is actually experienced in the chapels, which are licensed under the establishment. The gratification is indeed found to be attended by considerable inconvenience both in the establishment and in the presbyterian church, so that in the latter it has even been judged necessary to adopt a regulation, by which a preference is given to the opinion of those who contribute most largely to the support of the minister, the choice being determined, as it is technically said, by two thirds of men and two thirds of money. A right of patronage, however imperfect, is thus assigned to the more considerable contributors; and moreover, as it may easily happen that the opinions and wishes of the richer and of the poorer members of a congregation may be mutually opposed, it may occur, that this very regulation may serve only to impede an appointment, by precluding the decision of a simple majority.

Perhaps, however it may have been abused, the ingenuity of man could not devise a better expedient for administering the patronage of a church, than that of vesting it in ecclesiastical superiors, responsible for the exercise of it to public opinion. The church of Scotland has its patronage distributed among lay pro-

prietors, probably the least eligible of all arrangements. The disadvantage of this arrangement has indeed been actually experienced, and an attempt has been recently made to substitute for it the system of popular elections, with all its inconveniencies.

If the impediment, which obstructs a union of the two churches, be a preference of a parity of ranks among the clergy, let it be considered, whether this preference was not accidental in its origin, and is not therefore now maintained only through the influence of habit. That † a presbyterian system was adopted by Calvin, appears to have arisen from this mere contingency, that the bishop of Geneva persisted in opposing the Reformation. Calvin indeed has expressly declared in the strongest terms his veneration for a rightly constituted episcopacy. "If," says he, "they would show to us a hierarchy, in which the bishops should be so exalted, that they would not refuse to be subject to Christ, that they would depend on him as the only head, and be referred to him, in which they should so cherish a friendly alliance among themselves, that they should be bound in no other manner than to his truth, *then indeed I would confess that they are worthy of every anathema*, if there shall be any who would not observe it reverently and with the most perfect obedience." To the claim of right in the bishops, founded on a succession uninterruptedly derived from the apostles, he answers merely by expressing a doubt, "whether that be sufficient, where all other things are dissimilar." It is certain that Calvin, with Bullinger and others, offered to king Edward to have bishops in their churches, as in England, if he would undertake their defence; and that he has admitted that his church was deficient in not maintaining the ancient episcopacy. Other reformers, as Beza, Bucer, and Melancthon, have expressed sentiments at least equally favourable to the

† Lect. on the Phil. of Mod. Hist. vol. 5. 125---127:

episcopal order. Even John Knox, when he had declined the offer of an english bishopric, assigned as his reason only the foresight of trouble to come, and declared that he had done this with displeasure of all men. Neither was the church of Scotland presbyterian, as it was constituted by this reformer, for * he adopted the lutheran system of subjecting the parochial ministers to superintendents, who were invested with the powers of bishops ; and even a form of common prayer was established by him, readers of the common prayers being appointed for those congregations, which could not be supplied with ministers qualified to preach. The presbyterian form of ecclesiastical government was introduced into Scotland in the year 1575, fifteen years after the establishment of the Reformation in Scotland, by Andrew Melvil, who had recently come from Geneva, and was impatient of the lutheran character of the scotish church.

* Spotswood's Hist. of the Church and State of Scotland, p. 156, 174, 258, 275. Lond. 1677. As Spotswood was a prelate, it may be satisfactory to support his authority by a document, which he has adduced to show, in what esteem the scotish reformers held the church of England, and how far they were from accounting its government antichristian. In the year 1566 a letter was addressed by the general assembly of the scotish church to the bishops of England in favour of some preachers, who were troubled for not conforming to the order of the english church in regard to vestments. The superscription of this letter is ; " the superintendents ministers and commissioners of the church within the realm of Scotland to their brethren the bishops and pastors of England, who have renounced the roman antichrist, and do profess with them the Lord Jesus in sincerity wish the increase of the Holy Spirit." The spirit of the letter corresponds to its superscription, for the writers charitably desire the bishops to call to mind the sentence of Peter, *feed the flock of God, which is committed to your charge* ; and they also say, " in what condition ye and we both travel for the promoting of Christ's kingdom, ye are not ignorant ; therefore we are the more bold to exhort you to deal more wisely than to trouble the godly with such vanities, for all things, which seem lawful, edify not." They lastly press their application as brethren and fellow-preachers of the english clergy, engaged with them in a common cause against the roman antichrist. Ibid. p. 198.

When circumstances are thus favourable to religious union, the mind is naturally prompted to enquire, why the two churches remain distinct, particularly at a time, when extraordinary efforts are exerted to reanimate the religion of Rome, which, however we may be disposed to cherish social harmony, must ever in a religious view be considered as the common adversary of both. Perhaps no more satisfactory reason can be assigned, than that they continue distinct, because they have long been separate, and no one has yet thought of enquiring, whether the causes of separation had ceased to operate.

A scheme of union has indeed been at three different times attempted in England without success; in the conference of Hampton-Court after the accession of James I, in the conference at the Savoy immediately after the Restoration, and in the plan of comprehension discussed after the Revolution. These efforts failed; but the circumstances in each case were such, that success was unattainable.

The conference of Hampton-Court was merely an occasion provided by James for manifesting his secret dislike of the scotish church, and his determination not to comply with the petition presented to him by the puritans of England in his progress from Scotland. Though the Restoration had been effected by the assistance of the presbyterians, indignant at the usurpation of the independents, yet the mutual antipathy of that body and the episcopalians had been in no respect moderated. The episcopalians could not so soon forget, that they had been overcome by the presbyterians, and these, proud of the assistance which they had given to the re-establishment of the king, were eager to claim the recompense of their services. In circumstances thus hopeless a conference was desired by the presbyterians, for the purpose of considering what concessions might be received from the other party. The episcopalians

would make no concession, and the presbyterians would recede from no demand ; nor was it possible that any accommodation should have been then effected, for the agents of the latter declared that they had no commission from their brethren, and could speak only their private sentiments. In the conference which followed the Revolution, there was more disposition on both sides to bring the plan of union to a favourable issue, because both parties had severely suffered under the temporary ascendancy of the religion of Rome ; but jealousies still existed, sufficient to frustrate the efforts of those, who were anxious for a comprehension. In this case the opposition was made chiefly by the presbyterians, who would propose no conditions, and received in silence the overtures of the episcopalians. The former were probably jealous of the doctrine of passive obedience, which they considered as held by the established clergy. The episcopalians were on their part apprehensive of affording a fair pretence for a schism of their church, which the jacobite clergy, then under suspension, were threatening to make.

The causes of mutual alienation have long lost their influence, especially in Ireland, where every trace of political distinction has been effaced during almost the half of a century. At this time, on the contrary, there are even in operation causes, which should dispose the minds of both parties, especially those of the presbyterians, to union. Both should be alike influenced by that prevailing principle, the apprehension of the efforts of their common adversaries. The presbyterians should now be sensible of the disadvantages of their existing system, under which they are actually divided in regard to the most important doctrines, and must in each congregation be ever exposed to the evil of uncertainty in regard to the religious principles of their ministers. The clergy of the established church can, on the

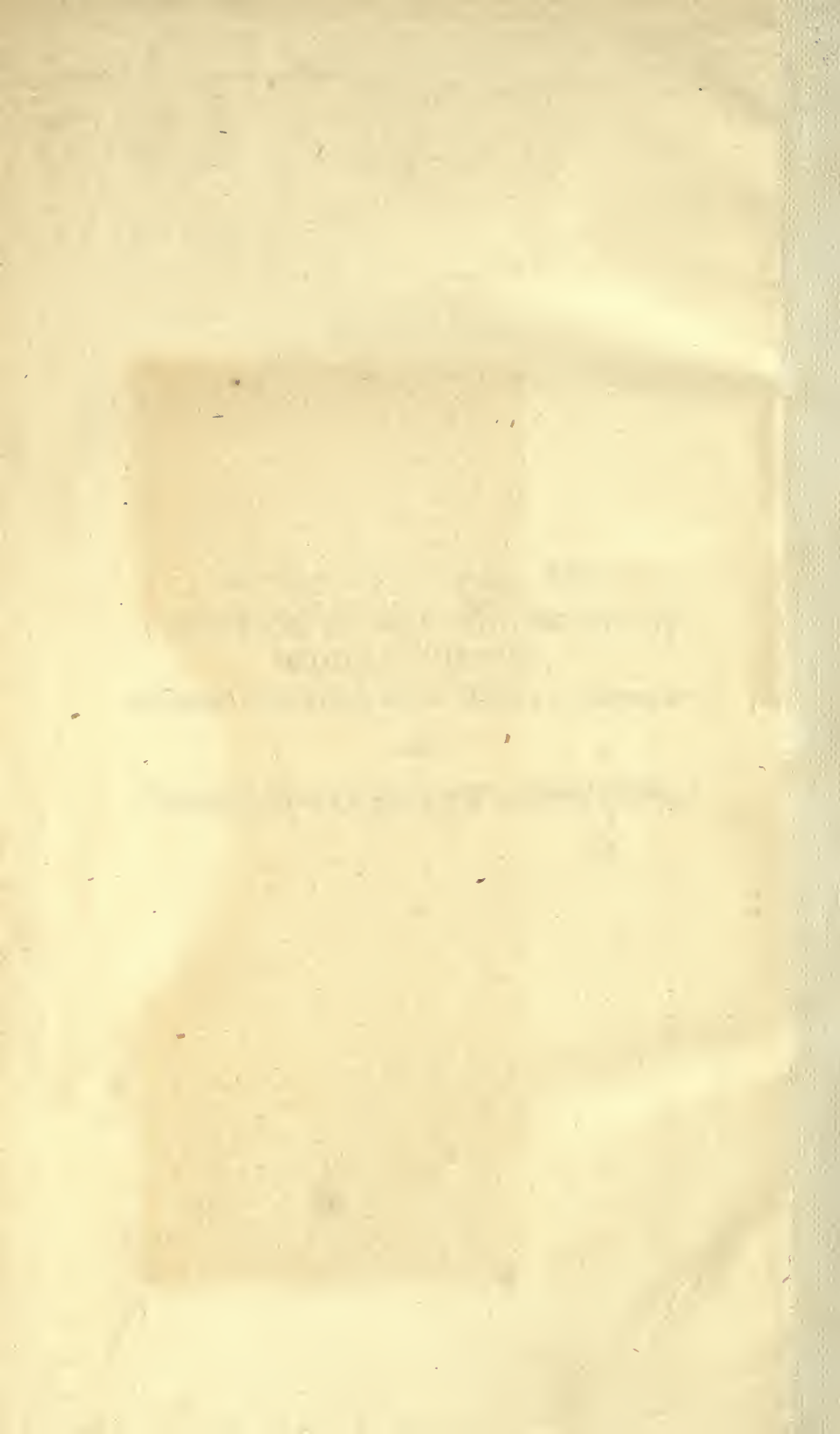
other hand, be influenced by no motive, except a consideration of the interest of religion, for the accession merely of the laity of the presbyterians would but increase the labour of their duties, and that of the ministers would open to others the participation of their advantages. That church too is now much more worthy of the union than in any former period, for a spirit of religion has gone forth among its ministers, which has rendered them much more generally zealous in the discharge of their sacred duties ; and it should be remembered that this revival of religious zeal began, as doctor Buchanan has remarked in the passage already cited, not among those who had abandoned forms, but in halls and colleges, amidst rational forms and evangelical articles.

FINIS.

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